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Youth: and other Poems

To the Hon. J. C. Callicott
with the Author's
Compliments +

Albany, Dec 12 - '95

Youth: a Poem of Soul and Sense, and other Poems



By

Michael Monahan

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To
The True, and The Chaste



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THE PRO-WORD

TO-DAY is mine for tranquil mood :
As one that casts the sum of days,
And, looking back upon the ways,
Doth find the end alone is good,
And finis still the happy phrase.

To-day I chew no bitter food :
The barren count of my past years,
The fickle vows, the futile tears,
The niggard fate, the fortune rude —
All with a changèd grace appears.

So lives the hour when came the first
Wild dream that, deep in my awed soul,
There lay, like forming seed in scroll,
By Nature's mystic process nursed,
A poet thought, unborn yet whole.

O fateful finding, fated hour
When I did learn this wondrous thing!—
A prophet Voice a word did bring
That laid on me an evil dower,
And still hath dues of suffering.

A Voice which said: "A poet thou
" Art glad to be? — well, very well;
" But must thou take e'en what I tell,
" More than the sadness of thy brow,
" Shall signify this oracle.

“ No myrtled ease can e'er be thine

“ Who, driven aye by harking need,

“ Shalt make the Muse herself to bleed

“ And aloes bitter drink for wine,—

“ Befitting thine own bitter meed.

“ Then shall a sore-divided toil

“ Perplex thy spirit with its hest;

“ And thou shalt beg in vain for rest

“ From gibing hours that aye despoil

“ Thy aching brain, thy barren breast.

“ And oft the strife for daily bread

“ Shall mock the secret, shamèd task,

“ Where thou dost ever pause and ask,

“ If this be as a poet said,

“ Or wears the Muse an antic mask?

“ So shall the scant, reluctant fruit

“ Which thou mayst pluck at fearful while—

“ Still dreading moments that beguile

“ And leave the word unborn and mute—

“ So shall it win a scornful smile:—

‡

“ A smile of scorn, a pitying word;

“ Yet who that hates could wish thee more,

“ When sinks into thy soul's deep core

“ The shame thy fear hath oft averred,

“ And all thy hope is slain before?

“ And then will come the blighting thought,

“ How thou hast kept some solace out

“ Of thy hard lot, that, all devout,

“ Thy task unselfish might be wrought,

“ Tho' life's dear joys were put to rout.

And of these dearest, tiny feet

“ That might not stray thy prison near,

“ Nor bring thee word of Eden cheer,

“ Nor little love thy love to greet,

“ Till thy poor rhyming scheme was clear.

“ And she whose gift of love to thine

“ Doth still accuse thy secret thought,

“ She, too, must widowed sit, unsought,

“ Till thou hast done thy meagre line,—

“ A verse with her lorn sadness bought.”



“ Nay, curse the boon!” I cried as one

With gall rubbed into cruel sore—

“ Peace thou, and trouble me no more,

“ Since thus so easy I may shun

“ What thou wouldst say Fate holds in store.”

Then laughed the Voice, but other word

It did not speak, and ended there:

Yet all was fit to my despair;

And ever hath my spirit heard

In that strange mirth its Miserere.

For truer prophet ne'er hath spoke:

The pain, the sorrow and the shame

Are mine — yet is not mine the blame

That in an evil hour awoke

The dream which soon a curse became.

So^{was} it that but yesterday

I yearned to give the struggle up;

Since I have drunk the bitter cup,

And blindly prove no better way

For Sorrow, weary of her sup.

Yet was it fated to the end

(The Voice spake not of such release)

Nor dare I thus to seek my peace,

A marrèd destiny to mend,

Till that First Cause shall bid me cease.

Then let me offer you my rhyme,

Poor product of the poet-trade,

For have I not my call obeyed,

Tho' this be writ from eldest time:

To-day I burn, to-morrow fade?

YOUTH :

A POEM OF SOUL AND SENSE

—“ *whatsoe'er thy birth,
Thou wert a beautiful thought and softly bodied forth.*”

—BYRON



YOUTH

TO you the strain that may not bring
Or fame, or praise of sudden note;
Or promise of a grace remote
To crown this hearted offering.

And yours the fault if, 'stead, befall
To him that weaves, perforce, the lay,
The judgments of an evil day,
The hemlock draught of human gall.

Sweet will it be for your sweet sake;
And Truth, whose vision finds no flaw
In keeping of her sacred law,
Shall of the shame a solace make.

And this sufficeth — for the cant
Of schools or critics pleaseth not;
Nor their award shall clear or blot
The page where she is habitant.

Yet would I seek, ere sending forth
What Youth and Truth have taught to me,
A wanton inference to flee,
A vicious folly's idle worth:

That such might not disgrace the line
Wherein my spirit hath revealed, —
As from a fount in sleep unsealed, —
The flowing of a high design.

Shall it be said, with venal thought
My soul laid bare her secret place;

That some the guilty clue might trace

Which their own sin and shame hath wrought?—

That I did sell for certain coin

What men would die of shame to speak;

Nor recked to bear a callous cheek,

Since pillory and profit join?—

Well, be it so,—and let the cry

The louder ring that all may heed:—

Yet one still voice shall make a creed

When clamor faints into the sky!



Graybeard, tell me not of age,

With its shriving and its psalm:

I do live and I do love,

And my pulse shall feel no calm

Till the need that throbs in me
Die in passion, purged and spent,
And I reach the frozen height
Of thy wisdom's element.

Oh, it seemeth yet so far
I have mocked me at the truth,
As a Hyperborean gibe
In the zone of love and youth.

Meantime, there is many a one
Who shall cast a willing eye;
And when love is at the full,
Love may find a partner nigh.

Spite of all your moral saws,
This was written at the first;

And the ages have not slaked
Nature's aye renascent thirst.

Ebb and flow, a changeless course,
As with planets, so with men:

Naught is lost—Antæan-wise,
Strength so spent is strength again.

Calyx, crystal, youth and maid,
Chrysalis and bud and seed;—

Mark the Proteus in all,
And in each the crescive need.

What you call a lust of flesh.
Hath a strange grace in the flower,
Soon as hooded sheath is cast
In old Nature's working hour.

*

*

Give us back the Golden Age
(Still the latest bard shall sing)
With the godlike race that drew
All from Nature's holy spring: —

When the simple rule of right
Seemed the fit, sufficing code;
Liberty the common breath,
Nature making Man and Mode.

Vain to raise the distant cry —
Yet the boon might be regained,
Were each soul her sov'reign self,
And each mind and force unchained.

Thou, old man, who fain wouldst read
Unto me a sermon stale,

Keep it — if the priest say true,
'Twill thy lasting peace avail.

But for me the world new-breathes
With the love-scent of the rose: —

Thou art of the wasting ebb,
I am of the tide that flows.

Let me give, while thus I may,
To the strong compulsive force,
Urging human soul and sense
In the cosmic fluid course.

Lo! the cup is at my lips —
Hast thou all forgot the spice?
Wilt thou sweeter gain and drain
In thy nearing Paradise?

* * *

Thou yieldest, ah, thou yieldest —
Sweet one, I lead thee blushing
Unto the couch whence Love hath said
None shall his banquet flee:
My soul is drunk with rapture,
My veins are fiercely flushing,
The pride of youth is on me,
And the proof of love must be!

Long, long hath been the wooing —
Yet Love was never laggard,
By day and night he softly stole
Betwixt thy heart and mine;
And when his vigils made him show
A cheek too white and haggard,
Then, then thy gentle pity flowed,
A sweet remorse was thine.

Thou tookst him in thy bosom —
And with soft words relenting,
Didst warm him back to life again,
Yea, badest him live for thee:
“ Be mine the fated sin,” thou criedst,
“ Be mine the sad repenting;
“ Lo! here my vestal zone unbound,
“ So thou wilt bide with me!”

O rarest balm and healing! —
Ee'n as the words were uttered,
The boy did feel thy bosom's glow,
And at thy kissing mouth
His fainting spirit feebly clung,
Till life that barely fluttered
In deadly chill a moment thence,
Drank in the vital south.

So came the tender yielding —
So, sweet, I lead thee blushing
Unto the couch whence Love hath said
None shall his banquet flee;
My soul is drunk with rapture,
My veins are fiercely flushing,
The pride of youth is on me,
And the proof of love must be!



What is Nature? — Is it sin? —
So the moralists begin;
And a shame will sudden rise,
As to color the surmise,
Till we see with clearer eyes;
Till the scales of custom fall,
And the light illumine all.

Then we nearer draw to God
In the path the seers have trod ;
Then old Sinai seems not high
For the spirit's mastery.
All is good which He hath made,
There is neither mean nor great ;
Nor of aught be thou afraid,
Wouldst thou find the Central Fate.

Shall a figleaf turn us back
From the godhead's viewless track?
Shall a priest-born, coward fear,
When the dawn of Truth is near,
Drive us from a vantage ground
That the centuries have found?

No! — the secret stress of Nature
Holds a clue, if thou be brave;
Every cycle sees a shackle
Stricken from the moral slave: —

Till, at last, in light erected,
He shall taste the higher air;
And the Infinite invite him
Its eternal truth to share.

For the freeing trend is forward,
Tho' the march be ever slow —
Yea, unseen, save by the Watcher
O'er the struggle here below:
But the years have each a story,
As the garnered sum doth show.



Wherefore, Censors, take ye heed
How these pages you shall read.
'Tis not yours to quick condemn
With a stalèd apothegm,
If the present text and theme
To your righteous judgment seem
Such as irk the palate nice,
Or to freër thought entice.

Better that you give it o'er,
Close the book and read no more;
For, tho' trivial the tale,
Sooth, I see it will not fail
To awake a critic scorn,
And a moral screed adorn.

If to keep from Truth aloof
Be to 'scape your trite reproof,
Mine shall be another choice,
Spite the Pharisaic voice,
And the swollen priestly pride
(As for this had Jesus died!)
Somewhat chastened in these days,
Yet, with old dogmatic phrase,
Dealing blame eterne or praise.

* * *

As the sap mounts in the tree,
Ere the young Spring sets it free,
Blindly seeking liberty,—
So the first desire of youth,
Charged with Passion's early truth,

Innocent of older feigning,
Scarce the conscious impulse reining,—
Rages — till a vent be found,
And the flow relieve the wound.

Who hath known the sick suspense
Of a starvèd continence,
Knoweth Nature's ordered law
In the quick, all-melting thaw,
Ere the love-god's subdued wrath
Glean a languid aftermath:
Naught is left desire, and then
Builds the mystic force again.

Here the spring of wonder hid,
No o'ertopping pyramid;—
This the process, this the course
Whence to track the primal source;

Life of life and birth of birth,—
All the mystery is worth:—
Searcher, strike your scalpel here,
And the secret shall appear!



Doth all Nature seem to pair
With no wise, prolific care?
Doth the seed mature and burst
(Nature's miracle the first)
Save in answer to a call,
Bidding ripeness to befall?

So renews the germ of life,
So the vigor of the strife
Freshly keeps its salt and sweet,
Till the ultimate defeat.

* * *

Since confession may relieve
Secret burthen of the soul,
Making us in virtue whole
For the sin it doth bereave;—

I will tell it, every word,
Sparing neither pain nor bliss;—
Fools shall say, somewhat like this
They have idly read or heard.

But the wise shall better know,
For the theme, tho' ever old,
Hath not yet been fairly told,
And it plucks all ears below:—

Plucks, and yet small thanks be due
To the weaver of the lay;
Few his fault will e'en gainsay,
None will care to speak him true.

He shall taste the bitter gibe
And the bigot's damning blame;
Execrate shall be his name
With the Pharisaic tribe.

And a timid friend shall say:
"Sooth, the word, the thought are good,
"Yet but dimly understood
"Till there come a broader day."

This hath ever been the lot
(Trite the saying) of the seer
Who hath read his mission clear,
And its penalty forgot.

Be his need to stand alone,
Blotting naught which here is writ;

Holding fast to what is fit,
Lest the Truth be overthrown.

Let him close the page who seeks
What may please his grosser mood —
Here is not a lustful food,
But a Truth that truly speaks.

* * *

Spring of youth, the lilt of lightness,
Soul untouched with sin's alloy;
All the world's ungainèd guerdon
At the bidding of a boy.

Now the happy earth-horizon
Shall not hide the crested seas;
And the vision and the promise
Searcheth down the centuries:

Questing in the spoil of ages
For a story that may suit,
With no end or aim miscarried,
And a rich resultant fruit.

Oh, the riot and the rapture! —
Let the trial quick be made,
Ere the fairy world hath melted
And the bauble hope decayed.

Swift as in the magic legend
Vanishes the sudden scene,
Comes the cruel disenchanter —
All is as it ne'er had been!

Golden glamour, gay illusion,
Bitter, yet divine deceit;

And the future holds no promise
That shall match the blessed cheat.

Nay, the future is but yearning
For the dream that once so thrilled
With the glory of its seeming,
And the guerdon unfulfilled!



Here is my boy,
Blue-eyed and brave,
A prince in his right:
For the morning of joy
To his will is a slave
And his innocent sight.
In his spirit too wild,
Yet withal Nature's child.

No kiss half so sweet

As the touch of his lip

In the freshness of morn:

Oh, my soul leaps to greet

What a seraph might sip

With a virtue new-born.

Clinging fast to his love,

May I not look above?

A plague to my thought,

To my couch an unrest,

To my bosom a pain,

That each day is fraught

To him I love best

With peril of stain:

For his soul, like a glass,

Mirrors aught that may pass.

Oh, death!—must he learn

What too early his sire

Did prove to his loss,—

Ere the soul could discern

'Twixt the lower and higher,

The gold and the dross;

And the pearl without price

Was exchanged for a vice?

I know 'tis the curse

Foreordained to our seed,

And with fruit aye the same;

Yet nor better nor worse

That it lives in a creed,

And our God hath the blame:

That He gave me this boon,

But to blight it too soon.

What need to repine?

Say you then with the trite

Air of one who would speak

That which I do divine

Hath nor fitness nor right,

But a custom antique:—

For men from the first

Have this fantasy nursed.

No!—my soul crieth out

At the lie and the sham

And the old make-believe:

God's mercy to doubt,

God's justice shall damn—

But *He* may deceive!

This is impious, say?—

Well, then, let me pray:

Dear Christ, he is mine,
And the light I have lost
Shineth out from his face:
Dost Thou bid me resign
To the sea tempest-tossed,
My sole anchor of grace;
That my frail fearsome barque
Find no way in the dark?

See, this lily of thine
That a glory doth wear
From thy garland of pain:
With a tendance benign,
Thou dost keep her so fair,
And pure without stain:—
Yet she hath not a soul,
And the dust is her goal.

And Thou saidst, Suffer such
 (As my child) to come near,
 For the Kingdom is theirs;—
Yea, Thou lovest them much —
 Then, why do we fear,
 And still send up our prayers?
Shall the Saviour not save
By the promise He gave?

Let me bring to an end;—
 Yet for me not the phrase
 Of a credulous trust:
It is true, I may mend
 With the long count of days
 Ere the darkness and dust;
But the Heaven that may be
Seems the child I now see.

* * *

So renews the ancient fable,
So the gates of Eden close;
And the tree of cursed knowledge
Wider spreads and ranker grows.

Stands the angel minatory,
Masking a divine regret;
While the banished heirs of Heaven
Toil in agony and sweat.

Shall that tree accursed still darken
Till the light of God be lost? —
Do we yet but feebly reckon
What the primal sin hath cost?



Oh, ashes gray! — Oh, chill of youth's eclipse! —
Where now the magic beaker for the lips,
Hot, hot and dry, like the distempered soul? —
One drop, in mercy, for a sinner's dole:
'Twill all renew the forfeited estate —
Mayhap, set back the hand of moveless Fate!

* * *

Now are stirrings of the spirit
That a prophecy impart:
Nameless thoughts and furtive fancies
Into sudden being start.

For a viewless hand is shaping
Line of sinew, bent of brain;
Holding yet the truer balance
That shall equalize the strain.

See, a dark'ning iris showeth
How the early prime is due;
And the forces of the future
Seem to hint a certain clue;
While a nascent need hath lurking
In his eye's translucent blue.

Task and play are yet his portion,
But a haunting thought intrudes;
And the page shall lie regardless,
While he sits and strangely broods:—
Yea, the sport shall find him laggard
For his irking interludes.

And anon the spell is deepened,
Till a secret stress doth vex;
And the motive of his being
More and more it shall perplex
With the thing which yet it feareth,
Tho' a timid Passion becks.

So the hidden struggle passeth
With its pain and anguish fraught;
God alone a silent watcher,
While the mystery is wrought.

Oh, thou tender, brooding mother,
Here is that thou mayst not see:

Oh, thou sire, with formal vision,
Was this, too, unproved by thee,
Ere there came the riper wisdom,
And the smug security?

But the night shall bring surcease,
Tho' he battle 'gainst the charm;
Baulking Sleep whose poppy fingers
Faintly hint a first alarm:—

Now, at last, in dreaming slumber
Lies he there, with fancies warm.



'Tis her hour — the Mystic Woman
Who doth come when ripeness calls,
E'en as come the winds of Autumn,
When the fuller kernel falls.

Never faileth she the summons
Bidding her unto her own ;
For the force of Nature working
Makes the need of Nature known.

Lo, her charmèd presence seemeth
To the gifted sense of sleep,
As a figure in the arras
Shall a strange enchantment keep.

Naught she wears to veil the beauty
Waking eye hath never seen ;
Nor might Nature show her likeness
'Mongst her miracles terrene.

White is she, beyond all whiteness
That on human sense hath dwelt;
With divinest contours glowing,
And a ravishment unfelt

In the grosser play of passion
With a woman of the flesh —
Soon in this the lees of lewdness,
Aye in that a charm afresh.

Fairer than the nymph of fable
Whom the classic fancy sees
Loose her zone for love's fruition
In the amorous Cyclades.

Nay, my simile is idle
To denote her wordless charm:
See, the Paphian queen retireth —
Vain her loveliness to harm.

Not is hers the sinless rapture
Of a soul as yet unstained ;

With the secret seal unbroken,
And the lethal curse ungained.

Waiteth she another season,
Ere her lure shall be employed ;
When the spirit, gross-entangled,
Calleth shapes from out the void.



Now the red cheek of the sleeper
Shows the strife that hath begun,
And a quicker pulse is telling
Of the long expected One.

Draws she near, while burns the hectic
Earnest of her coming joy,—
As she bore a gift of healing
For his vexèd soul's annoy.

Doth no tender sorrow seize her,
Bending soft his couch above;
Marking all his wildered anguish,
In the first desire of love?

She, the beautiful, the heartless,
Filcher of the young soul's faith,—
Is not here a sight to soften
E'en the rigor of a wraith?

Had she pulse, or soul, or feeling,
Might she not her mood relent,
Ere the treasure hath been rendered,
And the sacred phial spent?

Aye!—as sweeps the flood resistless
From its long-locked mountain bed,

When the icy fetters vanish,
And the plain is overspread:—

This the melting ruth she yieldeth
To his vague, unformèd prayer;
While his timid soul doth tell him,
'Twere in vain that she forbear.

Yet the force of his young spirit
Uttereth a brave protest
'Gainst the viewless toils that wrap him
And the Shadow's eager hest.

* * *

Vain, oh, vain is all the striving,—
She hath thrown his curtains wide,
And he sinks inert, tho' conscious
Of the vision glorified.

Ne'er, oh ne'er was lady's wooing
Of a fashion like to hers;
Cloying nuptial love's embraces,
Making countless perjurers.

And he answereth her challenge,
Spite of utmost force of will;
For the pulsing lack within him
Hath a liquor to distil.

Doth she speak?—as plays the zephyr
In some music-haunted shell:—
Hears his rapt soul the soft message
She doth feel or feign so well:

*Love am I, and me thou knowest,
Soon, ah, soon shalt better know,
When the fond desire is rising,
And the heats of rapture glow.*

*Long this heart hath held the summons,
Caught one tender hour from thine;
Yet I waited for the moment
Thou shouldst ripely blush as mine.*

*Watched I o'er thy sweet unfolding
Till the bud the fruit became:—
Other hands shall gather after,
But the first dear meed I claim.*

*'Tis the time, nor may I linger
When the debt of joy is due:—
Love like mine hath little idlesse
Love's sweet sin to bless or rue.*

*Ah, this coyness! — I had feared it:
Youth, do not the charm delay,
While the friendly darkness driveth
Yet afar the churlish day.*

*Lo! I bring a balm of cooling
 For thy soul's compulsive fire:—
 'Twere unmeet thou shouldst deny me—
 Keeper of the world's desire!*

*See, oh youth, I shall not touch thee,
 Yet the night is much acold:—
 'Twere no dalliance should I ring thee
 In these arms a king may hold.*

* * *

Is it better to lie,
 To spend and to burn
 With a secret desire;
 Losing all in the fire,
 Getting naught in return,
 While love passeth by?
 Let your moralist say
 Who hath proved either way.

Yet in rhyme let me wreak

My deep loathing and scorn

Of the lust-ridden fool,

To whom Nature doth speak

As to Adam new-born

Out of Eden's chaste rule;

Never changing the mood

For a high interlude.

Him rank I chief cursed

'Mongst a race that has none

Without some mark of ill; —

For tho' Nature give thirst,

And the draught must be won,

Yet shall each get his fill:

But the rage of the leech

Doth its own lesson teach.

If the touch of the flesh
 Leave a stain on the soul
 And a shame in the mind,—
 Is it not that, behind
 What our fears do control,
Stick we fast in the mesh
 Of a creed that we ken
 Too exalted for men?

And if One was who walked
 Without shadow of sin
 Or a prompting of lust,—
 Is it fair that we must
 So our righteousness win?
And will Nature be balked
 Of the meed of her due,
 Since a God might eschew?

No, no! — And the lie

 Beareth fruit of its kind,

 And will bear to the last:—

 So the Levites are classed

 As of those with a mind

The old Adam to ply,

 And those who pluck free

 Of the flesh and the tree!

Yet 'twere better, perchance,

 Could a man put aside

 The torment of his blood;

 Tho' I hold not the good

 Are they only that hide

From the spell of Love's glance:

 Starving ever the need

 That conflicts with a creed.

But if all things were free
As God's light and God's air
(Why *not* all as are these ?)
Then, in glad liberty,
Love should find himself fair,
Nor desire a disease:
And a new race might rise,
Fit for earth and the skies.

Such a race as once trod
In the fable or fact
That is lost to our ken;
When the fair Sons of God,
With a strange lust attacked,
Stooped as rivals to men;
And forgot their high birth
For the Daughters of Earth.



Cruel in her strong enchantment,
Quick her lips are at his mouth;
And the fragrance of her breathing
Stolen seems from the sweet south.

Oh, the clinging and the coyness,
And the lips that turn away
When desire is hotly mounted
For the unavailing fray!

Could he rend the veil of slumber,
All her charm might yet be vain,
And the baffled phantom driven
Out from bed and heart and brain.

But a deadness that increaseth
Holdeth him entailed, supine:
Feareth he the last encounter
And the ripe semitic wine.*

* The semitic milk.—Walt Whitman.

And a vampyre's thirst is gladness
To the fever now he feels:

Soul and sense are wildly burning,
Yet her lip the plague aneels.

Soon his pudent fear or feigning
Shrinketh not from new alarms;

And the regnant need and rapture
Give him wholly to her arms.

Lo! she folds him in embraces
Till the strife to madness leads:—

Yet reluctant he to render
That for which she mutely pleads.

Worn, at last, and spent, and beaten,
Shame and wrath he fain defers;
And, before the morning cometh,
The fond victory is hers!

Still that fashion old endureth:—

Ere the living bride be won,
Youth must bed the Phantom Lady,
And the tides of love must run.



Now the world is changed
And a new dawn breaks;
And the working spell
Its unquiet makes.

Cuts the Serpent's tooth
With its elder pain;
And the destined curse
Stuns the glad refrain

Of the bounding earth
And the skies at wheel —
This shall still be heard,
Tho' the centre reel!

For the fruit is plucked,
And the sheath is rent:
Gone are simple peace
And the first content.

These no more shall come
To a breast at ease;—
Life hath nothing left
That may wholly please.

'Tis enough to pay
For the fated boon:—
Were't to do again,
Not again so soon.

O'er and o'er he beats
This upon his brain:
Were she now to come,
He the strife would gain.

With a stronger will
And a chastened force —
Sure her charm would fail,
And her ancient course.

But 'tis done, 'tis done;
And the ill abides,
And a Fate derides
While the web is spun!

* * *

Thou who dost give thyself
Wholly to me,
Thy soul-kiss, thy mouth-kiss
With like ecstasy:
Say, dost thou hearken
Unto the sad voice,
Still knelling the hour
When the worm shall rejoice?

Nay, thou scornest the text,
And I lie here, supine,

While ever thou wooest
With languor divine:

Thy lips dropping balsam,
Thy heart breathing sighs;

Thy sweetness seducing
To love's last emprise.

Now, now in the fashion
Of gods and of men,

I seek thee in rapture,
Again and again:—

As a brook to the river,
I give unto thee,

And thou yieldest all
To love's infinite sea.

Oh, God, how thou bindest
My soul in thy thrall ! —

The tides of thy love-life
To my currents call ;

And quick to their bidding
The responsive flow —

Yea, tho' thou drain me,
I might not forego !

I cling to thy rose-mouth
And drink thy sweet breath,

Till love find the guerdon
That seemeth like death :—

I die in the giving —
Ah, sweet, let me go,

Thus loving and vanquished,
The Secret to know.

Nay, now thou recallest
With love's vital kiss

My spirit that fainted
With overmuch bliss.

A kiss on the forehead,
A kiss on the lips,
And my soul passeth out
From her recent eclipse.

So I nurse at thy mouth,
And I warm at thy breast,
And thou lovest me more
For the weakness confessed.

I know not the dearer —
The joy I now feel,
Or the rapture that came
When my life thou didst steal.

And what of the preacher,
And what of the grave,
The worm and the darkness ?
Shall thy kisses save
From these in their season
The lover whose lip
Clings to thine as if there
'Twould eternity sip ?

Nay, I care not — enough
That we live, that we love ;
For us not the doubting
Below or above :—
Thy soul-kiss, thy mouth-kiss
The food which I crave,
And, death's easy conquest,
Thy bosom my grave !



Oh, Lady, I have loved you
With a passion all too warm:
Loth was I to hear the story
That you do your lovers harm.

Passing sweet our nightly trysting,
Till the boy's cheek grew too pale,
And an elder wisdom whispered,
Other love should now prevail.

Then we parted — yet, believe me,
I have not your rival found
In the ranks of fleshly beauties,
Grossly seeking to astound

With a mode of love barbaric
(So unlike your subtle way)—
Fierce invoking gentle Eros,
To the timid god's dismay.

Dear, forgive that, having known you,
I could stoop to charms like theirs:—

'Tis, alas! the cursed folly
That directs our low affairs.

Fie upon the need! — tho' Nature
Hath herself prescribed the cure;—

Rankest disillusion lurking
Where the shame-god sets his lure;—

He who seeks the loveless traffic,
Seeks a pang that shall endure.

For the ghost of old uncleanness
Ever on my sleep doth fawn;

Satyr-like, she grins beside me
'Twixt the night and shamèd dawn:

Tho' I fiercely curse her, waking,
Yet the spell is not withdrawn.

Might I ever hope to rid me
Of a part of mine own soul ? —
Priest, what grace have you, or unction,
That shall serve to make me whole ;
With a sinless future opened,
And the past a chastened scroll ?

And the sting of fetid passion,
Sickly surfeit, bitter blame,
Cankering the soul's pure places
With a viper brood of shame :—

Have not these avenged her fully
On her votary of old ?
Is there yet a deeper penance
Ere her sum of wrath be told —
Does she weave a Nessus garment
His poor shrinking frame to hold ?

No!—our ancient love forbids it:—

Let me say a last adieu:

What was mine, beyond all purchase,
Freely gave I unto you;

Other lusts have yielded loathing,
Other loves have made me rue.



Oh, Eros, say what witching spell is hers,
That none may number her fond worshippers:
Paphos is gone and all the rosy crew
That sought the pagan cestus to undo;—
But still she reigns, and few do 'scape her toil,
And the first fruits of love are her despoil.

Ee'nⁿtho' I sing of her in idle strain,
Nor seek a laurel or a leaf to gain,
Yet, yet a pang will come to stab me through,

And old Remorse, reviving, query, “Who
“ Is this that tells a tale with cap and bell?
“ Methinks a sackcloth would become him well.”

* * *

Was it lure like hers that made
Phryne's unforgotten trade;
Holding Hellas in such spell
That her memory shall dwell
Long as lives the Theban tale,
Till all human story fail,
And the world forget the day
When she cast her zone away;
Gravest justicers to quail
With the charms she did unveil;—
Whitest bosom, flashing forth,
Making naught their wisdom's worth;

Nestling loves, in startled fear,
Pleading for their mistress dear,
Claiming judgment, in despite,
For the godlike wanton's right;
While the beauty-seeing Greek
Did his rapt approval speak.

Had the Lady of the Nile
Such a magic in her smile?
Drew she lovers from all climes
To beguile her softer times?
With a Cæsar in her bed,
Was her longing surfeited?—
Till the conquering cuckold turned,
Till her grosser passion burned,
And the newest slave's employ
Were her avid sense to cloy.

Was she queen of hearts, in truth,
With a universal sway,

Like to her whose ageless youth
Reacheth to our later day;

Or a crownèd courtesan,
Seeking only hearts to ban
With her lewd and fatal charm
That no virtue might disarm:
Making bagnio of a throne,
Loving for her lust alone?

Was she such as Fulvia's tongue
(In the false Triumvir's ear,
How the bitter accents rung
When the shameful end was near!)—

Was she such, I say, as *she*,—
Type of Roman purity,
With her pride of stainless birth,

And her consciousness of worth,—
Sounded—till the tale spread far,
And the half-world leaped to war?

Had the Ptolemaic charm
But a bounded power to harm,
Or to bless?—'twere much the same,
As, with Antony the game,
And a world to win or lose,
She the bauble did refuse;
Choosing a sublime defeat,
With her lover in retreat,

Vain to ask her sov'reign fate,
Now some centuries too late:
Closed the page—e'en like her tomb
That affronts the final doom:
Ancient scandal holds the tale—
Read ye there, nor idly rail.

Yet nor Egypt's queen, nor she,
Theme of eldest poesy
(Whom to clasp were worth the price
Of the Christian's Paradise)—
Paris' fate and Troy's despair,
Might her deathless charm compare
With the Mystic Woman white,
Giving all the world delight!



She had altars ere Astarte —
Back unto the farthest eld,
You shall trace her long dominion
Thro' the bosoms she hath quelled.

Here the earth-bound, dark Egyptian
Delving to the central womb,
Doth confess his sullen homage,
And enshrine it in a tomb.

Here the Greek, distraught with beauty,
Woos her in a goddess' guise,
And the dream takes form immortal
To amaze our changèd eyes.

Lo! the priest within the temple,
While he hugs a gross desire,
Offereth his guilty worship,—
And there falls no penal fire!

Look ye down the age chivalric:—
Knights in mortal jousting play;
Feats of prowess, deeds of daring
For a lady's favor pay.

Let the boldest champion answer,
If the silken glove he wears,—
Pledge of honor, truth and knighthood,
Fond inspirer of his prayers,—

Were so cherished, did the vision,
Comforting his nightly tent,
Bring not love's divinest philter
To relieve his longings pent.



So it passes—and the story
Is as ever but the same;
Touching all earth's wide conditions
With its glory and its shame.

Prince and pontiff, knight and noble,
Partnered all her sweet amour:—
Ah, the saints, too, had their longings
Which an *Ave* might not cure.

Doth not Austin tell the story,
With the frankest aim to please;
Counting o'er his days of dalliance,
Passion's tender rosaries;—

Saying how the wantons plucked him
By his garment of the flesh,
Till his saintship grew a burthen,
And he sought the Devil's mesh.

Oh, the tale of anguished striving,
Maceration, penance dire,
Fasting, swoon and lonely vigil
To forestall the cleansing fire:—

Then the plucking of the senses
With the soul at constant arm;
For the flesh that lives on lentils
Yet recalleth woman's charm.

And across the saint stylitic
Comes a madness passing sweet;
Turning all his peace to torment,
Threatening his soul's escheat.



I would I were a monk of old,
A little garden plot to fend,
A simple faith to point the end,
Nor any fear that in the mould
The trust might with the saint descend.

No cowlèd one than I more prompt
To rise upon the matin call,
When grayly leaving each his stall,
To pray that thro' the day's accompt
And silent lapse no sin befall.

And if among the holy band
Were some with souls untempered yet
To view the past without regret,
The touch of woman's cheek or hand,
Mayhap, still bringing unquiet:—

Oh, mine the task to strive with these,
 Until they yield me up, perforce,
 That which, half joy and half remorse,
Lies deeper than the litanies,
 And leads the soul an errant course.

“Thou,” would I say, “thou beadsman there,
 “That shamest all upon thy knees,
 “Think not thy guilty ecstasies
“To hide behind a mask of prayer—
 “As all were here Love’s devotees!

“Come, she was fair and she was young:
 “Still tellest that upon thy beads?—
 “And thou dost listen while she pleads,
“Tho’ psalm be said or vesper sung,
 “And thy weak heart a memory leads.

“ And thou didst love her — yea, mayhap,

“ (My vows defend!) didst often taste

“ A liquid lip,— and now dost waste

“ Thyself, as sighing in her lap

“ For more than she hath yet unlaced.

“ Oh, sweet, forsooth, to think how thus

“ She gave her ripe mouth’s scarlet bow,

“ When thou hadst been befooled enow:

“ Until thou saidst, still avid, plus

“ One full joy more would Heaven endow.

“ Nay, say not if thou hadst her — all!

“ My shriving asketh not so much;

“ And if thy raptures have a touch

“ Of grossness, sooner will they pall,

“ Since vision feeds not long on such.

“ Bethink thee of thy votive grace

“ And of thy soul’s undying care :

“ Then wilt thou risk the last despair

“ For dreaming of a woman’s face,

“ Tho’ Heaven’s host show none so fair?

“ A phantom love, that will not leave,

“ Unless thou break, for once and all,

“ With this which binds thy soul in thrall,

“ And ever doth the peace bereave,

“ The peace that makes thy holy call.

“ A dead love, looking from a past

“ Set o’er with rosemary and rue:—

“ And thou forever pledged to strew

“ The idle leaves, until at last

“ Thou mingle with the dust and dew.

“ Oh, take not thou the foolish boast
“ How love like thine shall aye endure;
“ But yield thy soul for pious cure,
“ And keep thy marrow from the Ghost
“ That woos thee with her ancient lure.”



Is't not railed well? — But well or ill,
Were I a monk of olden time,
This would I put in prose and rhyme,
To keep our souls forefended still —
“ *Shun thought of Her if ye would climb!* ”

* * *

Did she seek the desert places,
Bringing her own vague delight
To the filbert-fed, ascetic,
Dreaming seer or eremite?

Whispering that here was solace,
Nor a touch of conscious sin ;
Till the soul that dwelt in visions
Let the subtle Temptress in?

Oh, ye tombs of silent Thebaid,
Might I gather from your dust
Truth of avid worm and eyeless,
That on saints hath fleshed his lust,—

'Twere, mayhap, to hear a message,
Couched in phrase akin to this:

*Nature still is one and changeless,
And her end she cannot miss.*

*Saddest fools! — we lie in atoms
'Neath the soft Egyptian sky,
Where we scorned the way of loving,
In the time so long gone by.*

*Oh, the frantic dream of Heaven
That possessed our souls in vain! —*

*Oh, the cozened sweet of sweetness
That shall ne'er be ours again!*

*Gone, too, He, the Galilean,
Whom we thought the Paraclete; —
And the dusty ages mock us
For the folly and the cheat!*

*Oh, if Nature might be tempted
Once to change her swerveless course, —
Recreating these dead atoms
By her trick of chemic force;*

*And the gladsome gift of living
Fall as thus we mutely plead, —
Like the gracious rain that quickens
Worm and insect, bud and seed: —*

*Might the earth endure our joyaunce —
Might the latest-born of men
Gaze upon us without madness,
In the sweet of life again: —*

*Then would fade the dreams portentous
That do darken yet the sphere,
Where we lived in deeper shadow
Than is now our garment here.*

*Men should learn an hour of living
Far transcends a mythic trust;
And the love-beat of an instant
Worth an æon in the dust!*

*'Mid the fall of human altars
Would arise a music sweet,
As the truth of man erected
Should the truth of Nature greet.*

*Free the Heavens wide of terror,
And the human face of tears;
Gone the tragic past of sorrow,
While the present joy appears!*

*Life and love and sun sufficing,
As in eldest, simplest time;
And the universal travail
Made as easy as a rhyme.*

*Vain the dream! — we lie in atoms,
'Neath a sky we may not see:
Working germ and dust of Nature,
With no hand to set us free.*

*Ye who tread in our dead footprints,
Will ye learn a truth like this? —
Nature aye is one and changeless,
And her end she cannot miss!*

*

*

*

Come, Age, with thy phlegm,
 Thy laugh that makes pain
 Or a tolerant sneer;
Leave to youth that may stem
 Passion's current amain,
 What was hope once or fear:—
Thy struggle is ended,
 Thy harbor is won;
And a lightness is waxing
 Thy old wits may shun.

For the laugh of a boy
 Will ring up to the stars,
 And the earth-juices leap
At its challenge of joy —
 Yea, the welkin unbars
 That the planets may keep
Its echoing music
 Their chorus among;

Since the eldest which circle
Still, still have been young.

But thy mirth hath a strain
That still vexes the soul,
And falls harsh on the ear:—
To thy beadstring again,
And bethink of the goal
That affronts thee so near.

Dost thou think to renew
The lost guerdon of youth,
With thy pitiful gibe
And thy grimace uncouth?

Do thou draw with thy staff
Some conceit in the sand,
As in childhood thy wont;

'Twill not vex like thy laugh
That thou scarce canst command,
While thou broodest upon 't:—
Get thee blocks, too, and build
With a grave hand and slow;—
Yea, and cry if they fall—
But thy laughter forego!

And for this do men pray,
When desire hath an end,
And the hot strife is done:—
So surcease and decay
Hath a grace that will mend
What a dead force must shun.
'Tis a moral at which
Ye may smile or may weep;
Yet from ages unnumbered
No more shall ye reap.



And the age new-democratic,
With its equal lie for all,
And its cant of thought and science
That the Infinite forestall,—

Hath it found a way to free us
Of this cursed carnal want
Making of the soul celestial
Fetid earthly habitant?

Nay, it hath not, and the spirit
Of the newest age recurs
To the day of ancient freedom,
And a mighty longing stirs —

Stirs and links with touch electric
Thro' the universal chain,
Till the systems seem to crumble
And the world be free again.

Is there force to hold the peoples
In a broken priestly rod,
With the spirit's bursted fetters
That were formed or feigned of God?

See, the tender Christ, despairing,
Turns away his tearful face;
Weeping as He wept o'er Zion
And the unrepentant race.

Not is thine the fault, O Mourner,
If the world must turn from Thee,
With thy simple creed of kindness
And thy simpler mystery.

Kindest Thou of all the prophets,
Son of God, too, fitly called,
Since Thou brought'st the word of mercy
To a world by hate enthralled.

Yet I see thy reign is passing,
And thy gospel as a breath:

Larger spaces ever sund'ring
From the Man of Nazareth.

* * *

And the Lady who hath moved me
To this all unequal strain,—

Doth she count as many lovers
As in Passion's older reign?

Yea, her score is now the greater,
And her charm hath wider scope,—

Tho' the phallus be no token,
And a saint doth sit as Pope.

And men do call her Succuba,
And some do curse her shrine —

She, the daughter of Belial,
Maskèd with a grace divine.

Cometh she, the Elder Temptress,
To the Eden-lighted soul,
Banishing the peaceful vision,
Showing Passion as the goal.

Smell of sin and death ariseth
With the incense of her pride;
And a Hellish glare is lurid,
As from graves unsanctified!

Say, is this a monkish figment,
Feigned to awe the common horde,
That the soul be kept in shadow,
And the priest may play the lord?

Some, I know, do speak her beauteous
As the nymph that Numa sought;
Sprung from love's desired fruition,
In an ecstasy of thought:—

Bringing love's first dream of rapture,
Wooing like the pregnant south,
When the earth, athirst and fainting,
Lyeth in the languid drought:—

Whispering the need of Nature,
As with Nature's truth endued
So to break the mystic summons
That the race may be renewed.



This the fable to my liking,
And I bid the priest begone,
Ere, with mummary and missal,
He drive out the Witching One.

Be she Succuba or siren,
Dragging souls to hopeless bale;
Or a vision beatific,
Crowning love's divinest tale:—

I do owe her debt of gladness,
And in poet fashion pay
What the tongue is weak to utter,
Nor the Muse may frankly say.



URBS IRÆ

URBS IRÆ

I STOOD in a splendid city,
The gem of the new world's crown:
Riches and beauty in glancing forms,
A myriad marvels shown.

There was the glamour of sudden wealth,
The opulence that springs
From a turn unhopèd in the tide of trade,
Making the needy kings.

And there was the pride that keeps true pace
With a bastard wealth's increase;
Feigning a fabulous pedigree,
Seeking a lineal lease;—

Rankly effusing its poison round,
Tainting the freer air,
Where a statued lie illumed the way
To the dreamer's last despair!

All that the genius of newest time,
With wonder-working hand,
Can raise at the bidding of vain caprice,
With millions to command,—

There dazzled and clomb till the tale grew trite,
Attesting the power of gold:
And nothing that men deem worth a thought,
But there was bought and sold.

Manhood and honor — the precious truth
Of a woman's stainless soul,
The celestial ray of the early hope,
The glimmer of age's dole;

The principle high as the polar star,
Showing the God-marked course;
The passionate dream of a regnant right
Supplanting a mailed force;

The vision that vieweth gold as dross,
Till the test is brought too near,
And the dreamer huggeth the yellow snare,
Scorning his wiser fear:—

All these esteemed as of common ware,
And offered in common mart,
With a jewing cant and a cunning thrift
That sickened the honest heart.

And the God of the ancient worship,—
Had He no votive shrine
'Mong the thousand fanes of the city,
Beseeming a high design:—

None where the Christ of the humble heart
And toilsome path obscure,
Might rest awhile on His weary way,
Nor feel that He was poor?

Nay, they builded the temple and palace
Of an equal clay and stone;
And sealed unto High Jehovah
The shrine that is Mammon's own.

And the Word of His sacred giving
Is wrested to meanings new;
And a politic priest hath an anxious care
Lest the old should still seem true.

The prophets are sunk to a low estate,
And the Word that Israel thrilled
Hath a quibbling toil for the new elect,
In learned doubting skilled.

For the elders are chosen with thrifty aim
For that which was Dives' loss;
And the rugged text of the Scripture
Must carry a saving gloss.



Rich is the air with an incense rare,
And the eye hath a novel feast
With the stained glory of pictured saints,
And the gorgeous hues of the priest.

Holy of holies,— 'tis written thus —
Well, well, let externals go:—
Mayhap, there is something of holiness,
Despite the offending show.

And the lady who kneels in her rich attire,
Nor ruffles a fragrant fold,
Nor mars a line of her stately grace,
Till the service long be told;—

Mayhap, 'neath the swathings of outer pomp,
Enforced by her high estate,
There worships with holiest zeal a heart
That is never with pride elate.

Such have been known in the older day,
Yea, some that the purple wore
Gained a fadeless crown with the golden toil
Which in humbleness they bore.

I do not hold that the saints are all
Returnèd to mortal dust;
For one hath but died whom the lepers blessed,
And who cherished a Christ-like trust!

And here, perchance, in a temple proud
That vexes the thoughtful soul,
The strife of saintship is bravely borne,
And the cross appears the goal.



But I do not wait for the preacher,—
Too oft hath his formal word
And rhetoric polished for ears precise,
My soul's resentment stirred.

Never a spark struck out in the heat
Of a righteous soul at arm ;
But a pulseless theme, and a lifeless word,
And a cold and cultured charm.

Forth let me fare to the city's heart,
Lit now with electric sheen ;
The garish newness of recent wealth
In a riant radiance seen.

And the fabled calm of the Sabbath,
It here hath found no place ;
For Passion enticeth with lure polite,
In the splendor of silk and lace.

Where are the mothers whom God shall bless
And touch with His fruitful hand,
That the seed may be good, and the sowing
Bring gladness to the land?

Surely not here where the Serpent walks
As in fallen Paradise ;—

Where Lust hath her mart and a virtue rare
Shall bid for the highest price !

Alas! — and the seraphs seem to wear
The garment of scarlet hue;
For many are here in their freshest youth,—
As there were naught to rue!

Eyes that still keep the chast'ning ray
Of a virtue and truth forespent;
Now sadly waking a dream divine —
And anon a gross intent.

Lips that might utter the precept wise
Of a household's gentle sway,
From the royal right of a thronèd love —
Yet made for a wanton play.

Forms that were cast in an angel mould,
At bidding of common lust:
Betrayed and betraying unto the end —
The end that men call just!

And souls partaking the deathless lot,
But marked for a woe eterne —
If the God of all mercy teach aright
Where we His truth discern.



Oh, preacher! who prate with a cultured mode
And a moral entirely nice—

(For God's man once was a man of fire,
But now is a thing of ice)—

Come, drop for the nonce your pretty ways
That the higher dames approve;
And show the lie of your priestly frock,
When a wrathful pulse shall move

The man whom you hide with conscious shame—
As a Levite had cause to pray

That the God who gave him his soul of grace,
Might take his sex away!

Now for a flaming word, as of old,
When the movèd prophet spoke,
And the mighty were humbled before His face,
And the idols of Assur broke.

Curse me the guilty wealth that doth hold
These hapless in silken sin;
Mocking the tale of the Magdalen
And the grief that gnaws within!

Curse me the bitter, narrowing want
That assaileth the young soul's truth;
Till the tempted falls and a golden bribe
Stands aye for her bartered youth!

And if you have yet a deeper curse
Than e'er fell from damning seer,
Let it blight and wither the social lie
That reads a judgment here

In the red perdition of countless souls,
Created with aim benign —
As God were a pander to lust of men,
And the sin had a seal divine!

Call you the judgment that yet shall burn
In the guilty souls of men,
When the High God sendeth His lightnings forth
To claim His world again.

Let it ring from your carvèd pulpit
Till the deaf of heart shall heed;
Till the blind of soul shall see the light
And the fated sentence read!

Think not of the scoff, the formal sneer,
And the proud one's pointed spleen:—

Was not such the daily, sufficing food
Of the guiltless Nazarene?

Cry out on the godless shrine of gold,
Where the barren soul and blind

Pretendeth a worship that sees no more
Than the gilded things designed

To move a wonder that wealth is poured
To the God of a hollow creed;

Whose word of mocking and error and doubt
And sin is the fruitful seed!

Speak you and spare not, oh, trembling seer!
While the hour be not too late:—

It may save ten just from the city,
Ere His vengeance close the gate!



A BELATED SINGER

ALL song was sung before his day,
Tho' some few voices rose to fail:
The happy lyre, like Holy Grail,
Was borne from human sight away.

Far, far from strife and earthly clang
He knew the bards triumphant sat;
And raised their own Magnificat
With strain immortal as they sang.

Then went his soul unto them forth,
To breathe its timorous desire,
That something of their hallowed fire,
Some grace of their unfading worth,—

Might fall by their high will to him
Who, born upon an evil time,
Sought solace in the elder rhyme,
Nor recked of fashion's newest whim.



As in a vision it befell
He rose unto the Mount of Song,
And heard eternal airs prolong
The master minstrels' mighty spell.

Fain would his spirit then have sunk
With shame unto its human sphere,
But lo! its course was vain to steer —
With one deep draught of glory drunk.

And thus he staid, with eyes downcast,
Yet conscious of the splendor there;
The wondrous song he might not share,
The light that still forbore to blast.

The bards looked coldly from their seat
Upon the earthly stained one,
And ceased the strain that, half begun,
The choral spheres might not complete:—

All save He, first of that bright throng;
With crown of amaranth and gold,
And harp whose deep note ever told
The linked pause for prayer or song.

Him seemed he elder than the rest,
And on his brow a Jovian seal —
The thought spun like a magic reel
Until the marvel was confessed.



So swept a joy that half was fear
Upon the questing stranger soul:
For here was Poesy, the whole,
And Fancy's dream-born chart writ clear.

And now there turned on me the gaze
That vainly sought the Scian sky,
Yet thro' the far futurity,
Saw glory without count of days,

For him who wrought all time to please,
When closed the world of living light,
And opened realms of inner sight
Unto the rapt Mæonides.

Then all of wonder deep and awe
That ever tranced a waiting soul,
As, on the verge of Heaven's goal,
The veil was lifted and it saw,—

Came o'er me as I looked on him
Whose master touch the spirit frees
From the long thrall of centuries —
Till all save Greece and Troy be dim.



O shallow hearted, hateful time,
Whose every pedant fool shall say,
The sum is more than yesterday,
And just beyond the true sublime: —

What harder fate might e'er befall
The soul with poet yearning cursed,
Than with thy gall to slake the thirst,
And thy deaf heart to heed the call?

'Tis not the whole that Pan is dead,
And all the shining fable gone,
With that strange light which dwelt upon
His poet land, from cape to head; —

For this the world too long hath known:
But, worst to come, the final loss,
When, abject with its gainèd dross,
Fain would it for the past atone;

And weep its unavailing tears
For Pan and all his gracious kind;
And cry upon the folly blind
That led it captive thro' the years!



Then thus He spake: "Sing, if thou mayst,
" Yet unto us look not for aid:
" Forgot is all our human trade,
" And higher themes are aye to taste.

" Nor let the foolish dream beguile
" That thou may'st win an equal place
" With us the chosen of the race
" Of bards, since first the sun did smile.

" Lo! hath our circle been complete
" Since he that wrought th' Arthurian lay
" Did put his earthly lyre away,
" And come unto his proper seat.

" Yet is this vain — still wilt thou sing,
" For ne'er was poet so advised:
" And I mind me of one despised —
" Ah, well! — it is too old a thing.

“ Peace unto thee, if yet thou must :
“ Tho’ I have said, the songs are sung,
“ And all the rhymèd changes rung,
“ And all the singers come to dust ! ”



The deep harp spake, the grand refrain
Ascended from his crowned compeers,
Till, echoed by the list'ning spheres,
The choral answer rang again.

But e'er the swell again arose,
My soul did sink from that far steep :
Yet something of the strain 'twill keep
When song and singer find repose.



EUTHANASY

HERE'S the end of it all — not the end I have sought
Or feared, when the Darkness came into my
thought: —

Just a waiting at last, without pulse, without breath;
And the loved eyes, the sleepless, now weep "This is
Death!"

Not dead, oh, not dead! — tho' it be but a space
That e'en Time shall not mark — yet an infinite grace.

Never lived I till now: here is life, here is birth,
As falls from my spirit the grossness of earth.

From this pause on the portal why may I not snatch
What the long quest of ages were idle to match;

Tho' the prescience of poet, the babble of seer
Have misted the glass where I fain would read clear;

And ever arises to baffle my view,
Some monster of Creed that hath eaten the True?

Shall I look with mine eyes, or the eyes of dead men;
Shall I fear for the fable, the Truth shall I ken?

Yes, yes! — In the shadow which soon shall be light,
Let me turn from the myths that have made the long night.



Lo! now shall they darken my chamber of life,
While the tremulous awe of eternity rife

Doth seize on the spirit that, passing its bourn,
Scarce sighs a regret for the loved left to mourn.

Past all pain of the flesh, all remorse of the soul,
And the priest with his unction hath whispered his dole.

For now am I shriven, and all is confessed:
So much have I done, and to God be the rest.

To me not the rapture of martyr or saint;
But Heaven hath its favored — and vain the complaint.

Speak, heart all but silent, — what gains thee this peace?
Thou mayst not dissemble, so brief is thy lease.

How is 't with thee, now thou art sinking to rest,
Dismissing thy life as an unbidden guest?

O well didst thou love it, in spite of the ill
Thine age in full measure — yea, loved it until

This instant there dawned the white light that on sea
Or land ne'er hath shone — and thou long'st to be free!



And thou, fearful soul, now so strangely at calm,
As from the abyss there had wafted a balm,

Soothing thy last unquiet, or, finger on lip,
The wise god of Egypt had sued thee to sip

Thy first taste of joy ('twas but now the Great Fear)
Putting curb to thy speech lest a mortal should hear:—

Dost thou see then at last by the light that none see
And return with the tale— what was once mystery?

The systems that men in their fantasy wrought,
What think'st thou of them as they crumble to naught?

And the lie of man's hope, the lie of man's fear,
Do they fall from thee now since the answer is here;

Or, hast thou such faith, thou must needs turn away
From that which thou fearest thine end to betray?

Mayhap, all too willing to forfeit the clue,
Thou art glad to be freed from a dogma which drew

A faith that was flawed and ne'er left thee at peace
Between nature and Christ—yet would neither release.



Had the creed of thy choice — half in fear, half in doubt
Thou didst follow the Star—availed one more devout?

Jesus died for all men — did He not so for thee? —
Now thou too art dying, look up to the Tree!

Oh, believe, if thou canst, that for thee were His moans,
His chaplet of thorn, His sweet blood that atones.

Thou hast wept o'er His anguish, full-hearted, and then
Still doubted a God could have died for such men.

No faith like to His in the gamut of creeds,
Nor god of the soft heart, who prays and who bleeds.

And countless are they who repose in His name:
Some lifelong in evil, and some without blame.

Thou mocking one, silence! — Say'st thou, “It is true,
“ Every word, of the Man-God, and like is the due

“ Of him whose believers are equal in count,
“ Gautama or Buddha—and He of the Mount

“ Hath as prophet and teacher no better a claim
“ Upon His led millions — for truth is the same! ”

Thou liest and seekest to bring me to loss —
What! Jesus no more than a rival to Joss!

'Tis a lie, 'tis a lie! — e'en tho' vain is that hope,
Now that Nature hath shown what His Creed may not
cope.



Rabboni, Rabboni, Thou teachest aright;
Thy word is but kindness, Thy mercy sheds light.

Thou helpest to live and Thou helpest to die —
But so, I am dead, and the Infinite nigh!

Soul, thou didst love Him — ah, tender thy grief
O'er the sad Son of Man, yet of lovers the chief.

Then why didst thou prove (or thyself so deceive)
That all but His Godhead were fit to believe? —

And lost Him! — Yet now does the thought bring regret,
Oh, soul, with thy face toward Eternity set?

Nay, I read naught of doubt, and I read naught of fear,
But a spirit that seeketh its travail to clear: —

For lo! in this moment of infinite sight,
The life-thrall is broke and the deeps do invite!



Thou, soul, to such freedom wert wont to aspire,
And the penthouse of Creed answered not thy desire.

Full oft didst thou cry on the rankness of life —
For e'en love hath its share — and the narrowing strife,

The strife that the body may gain its gross need,
Nor the spirit revolt in the toil of a Creed.

Creed is one now with Chaos — the portal half past,
Thou mayst smile at the things which men hug to the last.

Beyond are the spaces: behind is the cell
Where man and his dogma and chimera dwell.

Son of Heaven thou wert, thy foot on the clod,
Thy soul in the stars — go to Nature and God!

THE TIME OF LOUIS THE GRAND

O FOR the time of Louis the Grand,
The rare old time, the fine old time,
When the world danced to the King's command,
The Great King, the Sublime!
When La Montespan or La Maintenon
Held her place in the royal heart;
And the poet might sing, if his venal song
Had the trick of the courtier's art.

O the lips that lied with a perfect grace,
And the eyes' unfathomed smile,
The masque of powder and scent and lace,
With its gay and gracious guile:—
What if Honor lived as a strumpet thing,
Yea, mocked at her patent shame,—
Was she not the favored of court and King?—
And the King could bear no blame!

O the light-o'-love, the lady fair
That did scorn *one* heart to gain,
Yet yielded her sweets without a care,
Nor seemed to know a stain:

And where was the churl to say her wrong,
Or e'en a reproach to fling,
 Since virtue to her must still belong,
Who shared the smile of the King?

O the perjured oaths, the broken lives,
And the land's unheeded cry,
 The pimp or quean that in favor thrives,
While the sinless serf must die:
 The wars which draw out the nation's blood,
Too oft for a trivial thing —
 My faith! such talk were not understood
When Louis Quatorze was King.

O the pomp and pride of the potent priest,
Yea, the stern, un-Christlike pride
 That sate with Dives at his sinful feast,
Nor the blackest robe could hide:
 And the barren word of his haughty dole
To the Shepherd's chosen poor,
 Who, starved in body and mind and soul,
Would yet their ills endure.

O those wretched poor! — how they bowed the head,
And clung to their bitter lot;
 Nor ceased to pray, tho' the tears they shed
Were of God and man forgot: —

And fearful the wage that time did hold
For the dread atoning day,
When the serf should mock at a bribe of gold,
And the master's blood must pay!

Yes, I like to think of the rare old time
When Louis the Grand was King,
And here am I moved to say in rhyme
What his poets might not sing.
The masque of powder and scent and lace,
The court with its splendors gay,
The sly intrigues, with their wicked grace,
And the King's own part in the play: —

O a merry sport 'tis to make them live
In memory's antic page;
And an equal justice my dream doth give
To the King and his entourage:
For when I wax weary and sick of heart
At the mimic, lying scene,
I close mine eyes till the shades depart —
And rises the guillotine!

MARIAN: OR, THE CORSET

MARIAN: OR, THE CORSET

MARIAN, she is naught to me,
And the years have swiftly sped
Since I listened carelessly,
When they told me she was wed :
Cold my seeming, and the beat
Of my pulse a tempered show —
None could guess the sudden heat
Like the lava 'neath the snow.



I was not her lover, no ;
Glance or sigh was ne'er for me,
But she thought me nice, and so
Gave me her sweet amity : —
Soon she grew to tell me much
(Making me her confidant)
Kisses, vows and tears, and such
Harmless things as maidens want.

Dearest girl, she little dreamed,
While she poured her artless tale
(Cheek of rose and eyes that beamed
Till the list'ner's sight would fail) —

Little dreamed she then, I say,
Of the pulse her charms awoke;
And her lip did feign alway,
Tho' her woundless heart ne'er spoke.

So it fared, and still she wrought
In her perfect innocence,
Love that grew a ceaseless thought,
Passion that did scorn pretence.
Slightest pressure of her hand,
Perfume of her hair or breath,
And her sheathed eyes' command —
These shall not depart with death!

Till I loved her with a love
Hot and human to the core: —
Let the sexless say, above,
Crowned and blest forevermore,
If the taste of mother earth
Sting not sometimes on the tongue,
Making momentary dearth
Where eternal joy is sung!



Marian of the marble bust,
Marian of the glowing soul,
'Twas not I that broke the trust,
Love but reached his ancient goal —

Fools, we dallied with the lure,
Till it closed upon us twain —
 Mine, the pang that must endure,
Hers, the hidden guilty stain.

For she came one day arrayed
In a robe of clinging lace —
 Wove with deftest skill, and bade
So to hold in fond embrace,
 Form that needed naught from art
To denote its faultless line —
 Gaily traced the needle's part
And the costumer's design.

Oh, the temptress! — had she known
How the fire ran through my blood,
 Not so near had been her zone,
Something she had understood:
 But alas! she missed the flame,
For my cheek was pale and cold —
 And a Devil quickly came
That the sequel might be told.



Then I said (as one who plays
All too well an evil part)
 Her sweet form did task my praise,
Yet a little owed to art:

And the Prompter gave me word,
Free it seemed from thought of guile,
So that Marian, as she heard,
Did but smile a careless smile.

“Nay, dear maid, your shape is such
“As Pygmalion might adore,
“And his Galatea's touch
“Cease to thrill forevermore:
“Yet the binding clasp is well,
“And it marks a charming waist,
“Where, mayhap, were *too* much swell,
“Were it not so wisely placed.”

Did she see the cunning lure
In the idle mocking jest?
Nay, I know not, but am sure
Quick my hand was at her breast:
For she dared me then to feel
(Helping out the Devil's plot) —
There was challenge and appeal,
And her corset pressed her not!

Then with awe and ravishment
I did leave her bosom bland,
And the Devil still intent,
Lower dropped my fearsome hand:

Slow she yielded to my grasp,
And her breathing sought my cheek;
Till I felt the vestal clasp
And the heart that fain would speak.

Then the fire leaped up and passed
From my swooning soul to hers:
Love had gained his meed at last,
Vain were sighs and soft demurs.
Death might come and judging shame
Curse the evil-fraughted prize;
But the draught was still the same
That the mirage woos and flies!



Marian, she is naught to me,
And the years have swiftly sped
Since I listened carelessly,
When they told me she was wed:
But the past is ours to know,
In the light of judgment set;
Nor would I that past forego,
With its rapture and regret.

AFTER "AUX ITALIENS"

A POET beyond compare? — No, no;
But yet has he won an envied glory,
And passion shall ever pulse and glow
In the lines that are linked with the *Trovatore*.

For the jasmine breathes an immortal scent,
And she who did wear it upon her breast,
Lovely and feigning a gay content,
Hath many a sister, were truth confessed.

And methinks the sad Marquis of Meredith's verse
Was not the first that did take to bed
A lady who plighted, for better or worse,
The heart whose love secret another had wed.

Ah, well! the story is aye so trite,
'Twere not worth the pains of a thought or rhyme —
Yet, yet, O friend, I recall a night
When it stilled the beat of the warning chime.

For late we staid in a guilty place
Where Love and Pleasure the cup of spice
Did press with a wild and mocking grace,
As caught from a fallen Paradise.

Then we gave ourselves to the headlong tide
Of riot that knew nor let nor saw;
And we felt the thrill that hath been denied
Since there came the Christ and the Christ-made law.

'Twas worse than madness — but let that pass:
No man may walk with an equal pace;
And the saint, if he study his soul's true glass,
Shall find him a sinner, with need of grace.

I said we were there and, the world lost,
Did sing, laugh, dance in the way antique;
Nor paused to reckon the present cost,
Nor cared what a colder hour might speak.

So the revel went, and the wine ran red,
As the lips of beauty quaffed and burned:
The prophets of wrath were dumb or dead,
And all they taught us too quick unlearned.

Then a liquid girl came to my knee,
(Her hair a Bacchantic web of gold)
And sued with a wanton witchery,
That the tale of love be not *half* told.

Drank she in odorous gasps my breath,
Eager the fount should unseal and flow:
It was love and life — denial and death,
Or the choice to my wildered sense seemed so.

Yet coy was I to her siren charm,
Nor might she have gained her fond desire
(Ah, the Devil hath varied ways to harm!)
Had you not arisen, with eyes of fire,—

And read in the tones that men have thrilled,
The poem which breathes a divine regret:—
The warning voice in my breast was stilled,
And her golden lashes with tears were wet.

Then Mario with the tenor note
That might soothe a Purgatorial pain,
Sang clear from the donjon tower remote—
We looked, but could only hear the refrain.

And still it rose with a splendid cry,
Then sank as tho' life would pass away,
And, swan-like, the singer perforce must die,
With his *Non ti scordare di me*,
Non ti scordare di me!

Yea, such was the spell of the poet's art,
The wine and love, the girl on my knee,—
I half arose with a sudden start,
And gazed beyond you, as if to see—

The lady who wore the jasmine flower,
And held a secret the poet knew;
The singer within the donjon tower,
Intoning his passionate adieu;—

The Emperor in his box of state,
Hearing but dully the wondrous strain;
And she who partnered his crown and fate,
With her heart aglow for Spain.

Ah, well might she when her world of glass
Like a bauble broke in the evil day,
Cry out to the nations that sighed "Alas!"—
Non ti scordare di me,
Non ti scordare di me!

Still on you read while she held me close,
And drew the spirit from out mine eyes;
Her petalled breast like a pulsing rose —
And the need that ever the soul defies.

What after passed I may not confess,—
Such joy doth leave an abiding shame:
But, friend, I hold for my guilty stress,
The Devil, the poet and you to blame!

And the golden girl who sat on my knee
(With lovers alas! how many a score)
Mayhap, the spell of that minstrelsy
Shall haunt her bosom forevermore.

'Twere much to think, for such love and wine
Fill up her life's delirious round;
Yet may she recall a night divine
When love the poet's own philter found.

And, perchance — tho' a social death divide,
And a wild remorse that shall never die —
The purer love to her life denied
May voice the tender, appealing cry

That rang from the donjon tower remote,
And the lady heeded with aspect gay,
While her soul did swoon in the thrilling note
Of *Non ti scordare di me*,
Non ti scordare di me !

MARGIE

MARGIE, Margie! your sad face lives in memory,
A haunting, guilty memory,
Yet sweeter oft than it should be: —
For scarlet was the robe you wore,
Tho' as a vestal put to shame
By some mischance — I loved you more
Because I might not blame.

Margie, Margie! say not such love was mockery,
A lustful, soulless mockery,
Since other men had love as free.
Oh, truth of devils! — well, 'tis just,
For love is not a thing profaned;
And he who seeks his love in lust,
Her image hath distained.

Margie, Margie! my spirit pleads 'gainst this decree;
This cruel tho' condign decree
Was never writ for you and me.
I wept to find among the lost
One of such mien, such brow of light —
As Heaven were moved to pay the cost,
That Hell might view its blight!

Margie, Margie! thro' all the count of years that be
The years of self-control that be
'Twixt that far guilty hour and me,—
I see the lighted, splendid room
Where Sin did make her trysting place;
I taste the bagnio's gross perfume,
I see your tragic face.

Margie, Margie! had I but sought the spell to free,
Yea, turned with instant step to flee,
Surcease had come to memory.
But no! —Tho' not as grosser men,
I gave you of my love and tears,
And spoke of rescue — there and then,
My coward self appears.

Margie, Margie! such love as ours is ill to see,
A fearful thing, an upas tree
Blasting the vale of memory.
I loved you, but I might not save,
And you, so like to the elect,
Did point unto a shamèd grave,
And my weak vow reject!

Margie, Margie! we parted — for eternity!
God's faith, a blest eternity
That shall annul the past for me.

I would forget your haunting face,
The tragic pathos of your eyes,
The gross perfume, the sinful place,
The worm that never dies.

Margie, Margie! peace unto you, peace unto me;
But peace to you, tho' pain to me,
Thro' all the dateless lapse to be: —
Mine be the hope that Heaven ere now
Hath wiped your grief and stain away,
And lit the glory of that brow
Which showed a seraph — but astray!

CATHERINE OF RUSSIA

I 'VE been thinking about Catherine the Second,
Who is reckoned
A lady of exceeding parts,
A queen of realms and eke of hearts;
To whom the world a merry debt
Of lusty love is paying yet.
And since that royalty pretends
The right divine with virtue blends,
A doubting world to honest Kate
May leave the issue at debate.

For that she honest was, I'll stake my reading;
Altho' her breeding
Might show a fault, mayhap a vice;
And sure the age was not so nice
But persons of august degree
(Like some to-day) in morals free
Might e'en appear — but that's a trifle,
Nor should it serve a jot to rifle
(Else would not I be holding forth)
Of her great fame and boundless worth.

'Twere surely wrong in malice to defeat her,
 Since lousy Peter
(Of course, I mean him dubbed the Great)
Was very near her royal date,
And left her a barbaric state;
A court where manners ne'er did trench
Till came the suave, lascivious French,
And fixed their own immoral code
Upon the rude Slavonic mode;
And showed them divers things to do,
Besides the trick of *parlez vous*.

But there's a tale which I am loth to credit,
 Tho', having read it,
In chronicles of grave repute,
'Twere not so easy to confute:
How Catherine a vulgar strain
Evinced when love did give the rein,
And might not then be satisfied
(I wish the shame could be denied)
Till sov'reignty were laid aside;
Nor hide—tho' Gallic wits lampooned—
Her royal will to be dragooned.

Well, what of that? — as much hath scandal hinted,
 And even printed,
Of her, the "Vestal of the West,"

Who lived a virgin (self-confessed),
Yet did a passing fondness show
For proper men — and felt a glow
For Essex, if the tale be true,
Which he on scaffold sore did rue;
Since her fierce spleen might not abate,
But left him to his hapless fate.

A tiger's heart had she, old Harry's daughter,
And they who sought her,
Or else were sought, in wanton mood —
For ne'er was maiden so endued
With that which bears a grosser shame
Than History would dare to name —
Did find too soon the fickle jade
Waxed cruel, while the sport she made;
And held a bitter thank in trust
For the last chosen of her lust.

Of gentler clay the lady of my praising,
Tho' quite amazing
In point of wanton fickleness;—
Yet knew not how to work distress
In them who, finding favor gone,
Might think to fear the changèd one.

Nay, tho' the story's past astounding,
For them her grace was aye abounding;
Her kindness flowed, her bounteous hand
Was quick to soothe as to command.

And, if the flame were some plebeian-ouski,
 Mayhap, or -grouski,
Who by his inches and his mien
Had gained the favor of the Queen,
And been elected to the bliss
Of her ennobling clasp and kiss;—
Be sure that she, ashamed to own
A love discourteous to the throne,
Would yet attend to his promotion,
And well repay a night's devotion.

I own this trait on me hath made impression
 Of long possession;
And I could wish a better lot
Were hers,—to be of men forgot,
Nor her hot sins in each new age
The prurient spirit to engage:—
That she but one true heart had known,
Nor ever mounted to a throne;
Nor joy less pure had e'er confessed
Than when love's babe did milk her breast.

Howbeit, there's no help for what is written;
And, tho' I'm smitten
With certain kindliness of Kate,
And wish naught worse were to relate,—
Yet, yet it must in truth be owned,
Tho' her warm heart for much atoned
(And then the Russian morals, too,
A circumstance we can't eschew) —
Her story hath such varied shame,
That they who love her needs must blame.

THE LEGEND OF JESUS OF MEXICO

JESUS OF MEXICO

'T IS said that in old Mexico
They christen every Mestizo
(Who is not named Jose or Juan)
After the sinless Son of Man.

Whence is the custom none can say,
But all know 'twas an evil day
The padres did the curse bestow,
And Jesus came of Mexico.

The padres are a scurvy lot,
Nor grace nor linen have they got;
Of learning such a scanty siege
As scarce to smell a sacrilege.

You see them in the Mexic sun,
Round-bellied, greasy, every one:
And, for your life, you can't say nay
To hints from sly old Rabelais.

And then there comes upon the breeze
The odor of their sanctities;
And you shall make yourself acquaint
How soap, as ever, shuns the saint.

But 'tis not now my private aim
Upon the cloth to cast a shame;
And if it were, I need not go,
Perchance, as far as Mexico.

Be sure the padres mean no wrong,
But they have done the thing so long,
'Tis most unmeet they now should see
The fruit of their impiety:—

A ghastly fruit for all to see,
That burthens many a Texan tree;
Whence smell and curse of death do blow
O'er many a league of Mexico.

For, strangest tale is mine to tell,
Nor ever babe this boon befell
But grew to scoff at law and order,
And eke to rustle* o'er the border.



* To "rustle" is to steal cattle in western parlance.

In vain the padre's prayers arise
For him who sees the hornèd prize,
And waits, till cowboy rides afar,
The round-up's symmetry to mar.

Then men with sweeping sombrero
Swift o'er the bounding prairie go;
With mustang or with lithe burro,
And lariat ready for the throw:—

Until they sight his guilty trail;
Then fiercely do they curse and rail,
And dash the rowel in the steed,
And pray on him to get a bead.

Far, far and wide the plain extends,
Nor rock nor tree the wretch befriends,
Who madly lets his plunder go,
And strikes a gait for Mexico.

But lo! the hunters speed amain,
And, flinging loose his bridle rein,
The Mexic man unloads a shot,
And one pursuer now is not.

Too late to save! — One last wild spurt,
And then a bullet, whizzing curt
Beside his ear, shall bring to bay
The Mexic man, the Texans' prey.



'Tis thus, with rope at saddle bow,
They'd Jesus hunt of Mexico;
And when they'd got him, shortest shrift
Would mark his dire baptismal gift.

And he, poor man, too well would know
To beg were vain from such a foe;
Tho' some regret for Mexico
Might mingle with his stoic show.

But chief would be his final plan
To die as fits a Mexican:
Nor would he even plead his NAME,
A moment's grace or ease to claim.

They'd bring him to a neat chaparral,
And there, lest justice make a quarrel,
Condemn to death, with briefest show,
Him Jesus called of Mexico.

They'd hang him to a likely tree,
Without one thought of Calvary;
And leave him, long-haired, rigid, there,
Minus the formula of prayer.

Perchance, in sacrilegious mood,
They'd fix upon his gallows rood,
In lieu of epitaph, a scrawl
Declaring in these terms to all:

“ Hyar Jesus hangs of Mexico —
“ Ten head he got — the rest ye know.
“ Did he not cattle steal below,
“ No man might have a fairer show.

“ This hyar's to certify to sich
“ As wants too quick to git 'em rich,
“ They're bound at last their luck to throw,
“ And swing like J. of Mexico.”



O Christ! a fearsome thing to see,
The wretch bemocked with name of Thee:
His eyes wide-staring, void of hope,
And round his neck the clutching rope.

The buzzard fierce, the carrion crow
Would Jesus scent of Mexico;
And feed his healthy flesh upon
Till there was left a skeleton.

Then late would come the gaunt coyote,
And, finding yet his meal remote,
Send shrilling o'er the desert plain
His cry, like soul in penal pain.

Thro' hollow ribs the winds would go,
Lamenting him of Mexico,
Who might in bed have snugly died,
Had but the priest that curse denied.



And naught avails to check the fate
That still the race doth decimate:
The singing lead, the lariat's play
No hint of wrath divine convey.

Nor will the padres aye confess
Their wisdom or their saintship less,
While but remains one greasy fee
To mock the God of Calvary!

'Tis thus that in old Mexico
You'll find that many a Mestizo
(Who is not Jose, neither Juan)
Doth call himself the Son of Man.

Thus cowboy, coyote, buzzard, crow,
On trail of him Christ-cursèd go;
And when they get him, all men know
How Jesus dies of Mexico.

A STAGE PICTURE

I N the lime light, in the air
Warm with woman's perfume there,
(Redolent of other things
Than the classic fancy brings)
Leaped a vision on my sight,
That annulled the present quite;
Led me back to elder Greece,
Perfect beauty, perfect peace.

'Twas Aurora, shrinking maid,
Of the sun's first kiss afraid;
With her bosom coyly turned,
Till the ardent lover burned;
And her nakedness divine,
Symphony of curve and line,
Urging on the god's emprise,
While the Night in terror flies.

Swift and fervid is the suit,
Every heart intent and mute.
Now the timid maid is drawn
Past the chill door of the Dawn;

And she fain would shyly look,
Could her eyes the splendor brook:
Psyche once was tempted so —
Why should *she* a peep forego?

Ah, what will not woman dare!
Now in fullest glory there,
See, she opens wide her eyes
In a glance of rapt surprise:
Ere her dazzled lids may close,
Lo! she fades — and with a pose,
Graceful as a dying swan,
Shows the passing of the Dawn.

TO MY WIFE

TO MY WIFE

THO' the vision and the music of the poet be denied
To the darkling soul, the ear unto a grosser
cadence tied;

Tho' the line be crude and halting and the thought of
little worth,
And the farthest flight of fancy never leave the leaden
earth —

Still may you to such endeavor ear and soul and fancy
move,—
Tho' the world look on with scorning, 'tis enough that
you approve.

Love hath made me your dear poet,—well I know the
highest strain
Of the age-enthronèd singer might address your heart
in vain.

Tho' the laurel never flourished that shall crown this
brow of mine,
And my toilsome thought and travail yield me but a
barren vine:

Tho' 'twere better to give over all the stress and trial
sore,
Since a narrow fate against me ever keeps the golden
door;

And my knocking oft repeated soundeth back upon my
heart
With a hollow echo, telling of the poet's empty part:—

Yet since you do sit beside me, I may not forego the
prize
Ever shining in the lucent light of love's untroubled
eyes.

And, mayhap, since fame is at the best no better than a
dream,
Holding but a barren promise and an ever fickle
theme;—

I may turn me from the rhyming crowd that fills the
common mart,
With a rage for gain unseemly and a huckster cry of
art;

Turn me to the light serener than e'er came from sun or
star,
To the faith that never falters, to the glory where you
are!



I will sing for you, you only, let the world go wag its
way,
And the critic with his little spite beguile his little day.

Peace and rest were ne'er my portion,—these I cannot
hope to win,
Yet the spider in the whirring wheel may chance a web
to spin.

So may I, amid the hunted care and labor of my life,
Snatch a theme from out of travail and a sweetness out
of strife.

You will read it to our children when, perchance, my
day is done—
Say me wrong if ever poet hath a rarer laurel won;—

In the quiet hours and tender when the lamp its cheerful
ray
Sheds upon the little circle, resting then from task and
play.

And the boy,—our first and noblest, whom his father
might not show
All the love he gave unto him, such as child can never
know;—

I do see him, sitting gravely, with the light on brow and
hair;

In his crescive youth fulfilling all his childhood's promise
fair.

Oh, the sweet and solemn vision refts my heart with
keenest pain,

And the tears do fall and blind me ere I well can look
again.

Yes, I see him as he hearkens to his mother's gentle
voice,—

First of all my household darlings, if my heart must
have a choice.

Moulded with a kinder purpose, fashioned to a gentler
truth

Than the dreary scheme of saving that did desolate my
youth.

He by love's own tender guidance shall be led apart from
ill;—

Not with means that call a challenge to the early force
of will.

Loving as I loved, but holding self in check with firmer
rein;

Master of his strongest passion, higher than his grosser
strain:

Hating with his father's hatred, scorning with his father's
scorn,
Tho' a golden fortune offer if his truth he will suborn.

Thus I view him, love and duty shining out from his
young face,
Hope and leader of the household, filling well his father's
place;

With the rest (as now I fancied) by the cheerful lamp
and fire,
While the mother seeks her solace in the sad and broken
lyre.

In such holy time and peaceful, what might not my
spirit dare? —
Yea, to viewless come amidst you and resume my vacant
chair:

Spread my hands in benediction on the loved ones of my
soul —
Poet, Father watching o'er you till you join him at the
goal!

WILT THOU FORGET WITH
ADDING YEARS

WILT thou forget with adding years
And babes new-springing at thy knee,
The first and holiest mystery
That drew our praise, our joy and tears?

Too long the pregnant cycle seemed
To hope that might not brook delay;
Impatient of the lagging day
When love's first pledge should be redeemed.

Yet steeds by day and steeds by night
Were bearing swift our wished-for joy;
And Nature at her old employ
Did act the timid neophyte.

Then came — when half our hope we feared
Had lapsed unto a sad escheat —
A sudden message thrilling sweet,
And life and love as one appeared!

For lo! the babe behind the veil,
As seeming doubt to understand,
Leaped up within the Forming Hand:
And faith and hope no more might fail.


THE QUARREL

DEAR one, there was a cruel day
 (Nor hath its sorrow faded yet)
 When we forgot the vow, the debt
Of wedded love, to love alway.

A sudden anger fiercely flamed,
 A wingèd word of killing scorn;
 Then Love fled far and Hate was born —
Nor matters it who wrongly blamed.

Yes, Hate! — for 'tis a wisdom old
 That love's extreme shall come to this;
 And lips which now but leaned to kiss,
Will soon another tale have told.

A passing madness — were't to last,
 The Furies then might rule content;
 And all the sweet of life were spent,
And all the devils inward cast.



But never was it writ that Love
 Might not resume his hearted reign;
 Or send as messenger in vain,
His snow-white, olive-bearing dove.

He strikes his harp, whose golden strings
 Lay mute or gave a troubled strain—
 And lo! the charm is his again;
Tho' here and there a tear he flings.

O magic tears!— do they not speak
 What love uncrossed might never say:
 Of doubt and sorrow cleared away,
Of darling Hope, serene and meek;—

Of love that found in loss its gain,
 And wisdom in the lesson learned,
 The deeper truth of life discerned,
The tempered pulse, the judgment sane?



Such, dear one, is the sadd'ning truth
 That we, mayhap, too early proved;
 When rather than our souls behooved
The shadeless joy of wedded youth.

But still it comes to youth and age,
And better that we learn it soon,
When life and love are at the noon:
The dusk shall other care engage.

So think I now, but not so then,
On that far day whose cruel mark
Shines livid out, tho' much is dark
In years of nearer, calmer ken.

Alas! it seemed that naught might heal
The breach which came our souls between;
And each did loathe for what had been,
And what no future hour should feel.

Yes, Love was dead, and we stood by,
So near our hands and lips might touch —
Nor seas could sunder half so much
Your heart from mine, or, eye from eye.

Thus, mute and sullen, still we staid
Till, all-reluctant, came old Time,
Prepared the knell of Love to chime,
And eke to use his sexton spade.

In pity at the pallid boy
 He threw a glance: then sadly gave
 His strength to form the shallow grave,
As one constrained to his employ.

Then had I spoke, but 'tis the curse
 Of love estranged to set a seal
 On lips that fain would make appeal,
And tender penitence rehearse.

Full soon he turned the clod away,
 And stooped to lay poor Love within —
 I took one step — as if to win
The little corpse from out the clay.

You trembled, as of grief beguiled,
 And vainly sought a tear to hide:
 The gentle sexton turned aside,
And lo! the boy awoke and smiled.

O joy that pain and strife impart!
 O sweet that springs from bitter fruit!
 Nor tongue may tell the rapture mute
When there I caught you to my heart.

So passed the cloud, and clear the day
Hath shone aye since for me and you:—
The wise old sexton also knew,
And took his spade and shroud away.

THE AWAKENING

THERE comes an hour, there comes an
hour,
The deepest dark and dawn between,
When falls upon the soul, I ween,
The shadow of a mystic power.

For Love and Life do sadly wane,
As blown upon by wind of death;
And, with the seeming lapse of breath,
The soul her freedom shall regain.



Bright shone my home with lamp and fire,
A loving wife and children fair;
And peace and sweet content were there,
Nor one unsatisfied desire.

And she, the youngest, on my knee,
With clust'ring hair and cherub face,
Did woo me with a soft embrace,
While rose her brothers' noisy glee: —

Until I dreamed of that far day
When first I held her mother so:
Ah, tender eyes, whose constant glow
Hath cheered my toil and shown the way!

And still do light my heart and home
With ray that ever seems to bless,
And heal the hurt and calm the stress,
When from the guiding ark I roam.

Sweet eyes, that evil chance do cope,
Dear heart, that beats alone for me:
And lo! the babe upon my knee
Reflects the blessing and the hope.



Now do I seek my couch of rest;
The lights are low, the babes are warm:
The mother prays to shield from harm
These ne'er by human fear oppressed.

And sleep comes down, as falls the fleece,
Till brooding murmurs die away;
And angel guards their hest obey
To keep the household's holy peace.

All hushed and still: e'en I do share
Some portion of the perfect calm:—
The thought of God descends like balm
Upon the sinner and his care.



A mighty rising in the night,
As of some strong-winged wind of Death
O'ercoming every human breath
With awful and resistless blight.

And lo! my dreamless sleep is o'er,
Tho' 'tis the soul alone awakes,
As 'twere the angel's trump that shakes,
And Life and Love were now no more!

Oh, House of Life, thy walls are laid,
Thy sacred places opened wide
To the all-drowning lethal tide,
And I must view the ruin made:—

Must view and still return, as one
Condemned unto a spectre quest;
Bereft of hope and seeking rest
Till æons mark its penance done.

Oh, heart, what is thy swooning fear?
Oh, soul, is this the moment then
Which opes to thee a larger ken,
With clay unclogged, a purer sphere?

And art thou now content to leave
This cherished altar of thy love;
A shrine where doubtings never strove
Against the truths which still bereave

Of that old Faith which lulled to sleep
Those countless, holding hope in Christ,—
But fabled fears were sacrificed
That Love his perfect rule might keep?



Not yet, not yet! — A little cry
That strangely seemeth passing far
(As from an isle of hope, or star,
Some voice did speak of succor nigh)—

A little cry that makes for me
Across the darkness of the night;
A baby fear that asks the light
And ends the father's agony.

I shake the lethal horror off,
I wipe the cold sweat from my brow;
But there is that within, I trow,
Which freëst sunshine shall not doff.

Chill is the air, and now the fire,
As dying with the night's extreme
(A sullen likeness to my dream)
Doth in its own pale ash expire.

CHILD CARE AND HEART CARE

CHILD care and heart care,
These are now thine,
Thou, whose dear life was pledged
Early to mine.
Hourly a sacrifice
I may not pay:
God keeps the reckoning
For His own day.

All that thou askest,
A look, a caress;
Joy is thy portion
To serve and to bless.
Day comes and night comes,
Ever the same;
Love in thy loving heart
Feeds the pure flame.

Oft in the silent hours
Wake I alone
 To ponder the marvel
His mercy hath shown.
 Graceless and dark of soul
Tho' I may be,
 A saint at my hearthstone
Is praying for me.

Oh, if the faults that were
Born with my blood
 Work thee unkindness,
Who only art good,—
 Grieve not, beloved one,
Nor then think me changed:
 Lo, if thy love revolt,
God is estranged!

Sinful and selfish I,
Greater thy meed,
 And blessed the guerdon
For thee and thy seed.

Love and all goodness flow
From thy soft breast;
Happy the infant there
Lulling to rest!

Child care and heart care,
These are now thine;
Still doth thy loyal soul
Duty divine: —
Duty that lightens
Thy life's simple round,
Till sorrow and toil done,
Thy glory be found!

HERE IS MY HAVEN

HERE is my haven, here my place
Of rest secure, of tranquil thought;
The home thou makest where thy face
Its daily task of joy hath wrought.

Too well I know the debt is mine,—
Thy life and love, thy hearted care,
The fruitful bearing breast of thine,
The chains of love which thou must wear.

Never, oh, never may I hope
To quit the long and patient score;
Thy tenderness and truth to cope,
Which rise for me in endless store.

Nor wouldst thou have it so, for love
Like thine lives but in sacrifice,
And thou must serve thy truth to prove,
Else, as a vine some hand unties,

Thy tender function comes to naught,
Its source of nurture rudely reft,
 Its timid ministry unsought,
And only death the solace left.

Sweet soul, it were an idle fear,—
Nor may it haunt thy gentle breast:
 Thy love and service twinned appear,
And God will answer for the rest.

THY GUERDON

THOU hast bled for me, hast shed for me
The rarest, deepest tears;
Thou hast smiled with perfect courage
At Death and all his fears,—
In the sad time, yet the glad time
When a little life was nigh,
And thy pain did turn to rapture
With our infant's borning cry.

'Twere no measure for the treasure
That I all unworthy wear,
In the joy thy love hath given,
And the cross it still must bear,—
Thus to bring thee, thus to sing thee,
Verses from my loving heart,
Vainly seeking for the secret
Which no poet might impart.

Deep indwelling voice is telling,
Fadeless guerdon waits thee now:—

Tender soul, thou mayst not wear it,
Till the peace is on thy brow.

Tho' I share not, yet I care not
Howso dark my portion be,

If my soul behold the vision,
If thy glory I may see!

OH, LIFE AND LOVE, HOW SORDID YOU

O H, Life and Love, how sordid you
To jaded soul and sense appear;
As in the saddened yellow year
The skies forget their cheerful hue.

No heart so faithful but it knows
The fading of the first fond dream;
E'en tho' a smiling joy would seem
To hide the lack that ever grows.

Dear love, e'en such may we confess
And wisdom gather from the pain,
The marring of the magic strain
That once our souls did wildly^{as} bless.

So come the vision calm and clear,
The equal poise of heart and brain;
The grosser self subdued, the plane
Of love's serener atmosphere.

Then fitted we to mould the lives
Which God hath trusted to our care;
For in such chastened, stormless air
The household plant of duty thrives.

And if the gain seem cruel loss,
As in the gray we mourn the gold,—
The dream shall bless an hundred fold
When Love hath laid aside his cross!

THY FAITH

THERE is no faith but has its doubt,
Save that which fills thy gentle breast :
The thought of God to thee is rest,
And Life and Love were names without.

Thou knowest not why—it is enough,
Thy placid being sees its hope
A steadfast light, nor thine to cope
The long, long quest, the wrestling rough:—

The vigil that shall little yield
When all is gained and all denied :
A sickened soul, a barren pride,
A doubt that doubting holds the field.

The babe thou foldest in thine arms
Hath such content of soul as thou
Who turnest thine unasking brow
From aught that perfect peace alarms.

Would that my faith were like to thine,
E'en as the same our earthly lot,—
For, if truth be where thou art not,
Vain shall I seek the clew divine.

THE NIGHT I LED YOU HOME

THE night I led you home, my dear,
The night I led you home,
When rite and ring our joy did bring —
The self-same path to roam:
When love no more might trouble sore
With cross or cold delay,
And winds were hushed as sweetly blushed
The bride upon her way.

The nuptial kiss you gave me, dear,
When we two were alone,
And I had ta'en your kiss again,
And peace was all our own:
The tender thrill is with me still,
And may it linger yet —
Oh, vanished years! oh, silent tears!
What is't that you regret?

Your shy sweet smile at morn, my dear,
When crept you to my breast,
And hid the face where love might trace
A maiden's all confessed: —

The tender ray then fled away
Where fadeless treasures be; —
Yet, when our babe her first smile gave,
The light came back to me.

Your patient trust and love, my dear,
Unworthy I to win,
But hope so brave at last may save
The sinner from his sin.
Ah, well know I were death now nigh,
'Twould bring no victory,
Should one sweet soul the blessed goal
Find all unshared by me.

Dear gentle heart, that aye forgives
What I may not atone,
Tho' faith be strong and grace be long,
And God still waits his own, —
Bear with me yet till nature's debt
Shall close the space to roam;
And you shall lead me home, my dear,
And you shall lead me home!

SON OF MY YOUTH

SON of my youth, in thee renews
The hope forespent, the brighter dream
That once was mine:— I kiss the dews
Of morning in thine eyes' clear gleam;

And strive with anxious heart to read
The page as yet unoped to thee
Whom angel hands attendant lead
Thro' childhood's holy mystery.

Had I a prophet's voice to speak
Of that a father's love would spare,
Should sin and shame still mar the cheek
Upraisèd with all promise fair?

And those sweet eyes whose depths so pure
Shine as the ray of Eden shone,—
Should they see on and life endure
When light of God and hope is gone?

Child of my soul, could I avert
What Wisdom warns and Youth denies
Till, all the springs of life inert,
Comes cankered Age as Folly flies,—

Should I the talismanic word
Then boldly speak for love of thee,
That thou mightst walk, unseen, unheard
Of every evil destiny;

Still wearing on thy brow the look
Which Eden's blest alone may share
With them whose garments may not brook
The soiling touch of mortal air;

Virgin of heart, nor knowing sin,
Nor e'en its thought thy peace to mar:
Such calm without, such grace within,
Self-centred, like a lonely star:—

Ah, Gerald, should thy father say
The word to bring such boon to thee,
That thou mightst walk a thornless way
To reap unconscious victory?

No! by the all-atoning rood,
The blood-marked steep, the stripes and crown,
The sacred pledge for ill subdued,
The sin that drew a Saviour down:—

Thine rather be the lot ordained
Of all who hold the Christ-born hope;
To fall with every vantage gained,
To rise in light, in dark to grope:—

To feel that He, the Saving One,
Doth seem to turn His glance away;
Yet, when sweet penitence is done,
Again to know the blessed ray:—

Thy soul to prove and ne'er to lose
The careful count of all thy years,
That of the sum none may refuse
The spirit's toil, the spirit's tears;

With growing age a growing cross,
A heart true-tempered in the strife;
Careless alike of gain and loss
So truth be one with all thy life.



Such would I have thee, tender boy,
E'en tho' I tremble at the hour
 (Thank God, still far!) when love's employ
Shall be to wait thy provèd power:

And I shall sit with folded hands,
Dumb waiting at my silent hearth;
 As one who dully understands
His aching bosom's woeful dearth.

Grant Thou, O Arbiter of all,
That he may pass his trial well,
 And my dim age hear not the call
Unto the Conquered Citadel!

UNBORN

WHEN wilt thou come from thy mystic
place
To glad thy mother's heart and mine?
Babe of our love, why lingerest thou
Till the cherished hope decline?

Thy mother is wan with waiting long;
Fear and awe do her care divide:
A home is made in our souls for thee,
And for aye thou shalt abide.

Enter thou into thy royal right,
Slaves are we to thy baby hest:
Thy throne is ready, thy kingdom safe!—
Sigh we still for the bidden guest.

Wilt thou not come from the mystic place
To glad thy mother's heart and mine?
Child of our love, still lingerest thou
Till the cherished hope decline.

HOME I CAME AND THOU WERT WAITING

H OME I came and thou wert waiting,
Little thou hadst to say to me;
Deep in thy heart was Love relating
The wondrous story soon to be,
When he should ope his mystery.

Again I came to meet thy greeting,
And lo! I sank unto my knee;
For, whiter than thy nuptial sheeting,
Thou didst not need to speak to me—
Oh, no, my love, might I not see!

But now I come when dusk is falling,
With quickened step across the lea;
A little voice is sweetly calling,
And two there are who wait for me:—
Bless God, dear heart, that this may be!

THE LOVE WHICH NE’ER A CROSS
HATH KNOWN

THE love which ne’er a cross hath known
Is not a love for me:
The heart which holdeth bliss alone,
The sunlight with no shadow thrown,
The tideless, restful sea,—
From these my spirit turns away,
As dreams that fade with common day.

But give to me the love which bears
A mingled joy and pain;
The heart that in its service wears
A smiling calm, nor e’en despairs
When storms do shake the main;—
The path oft closed by sorrow’s night,
Yet working out its way to light.

Then may I rise and gird me on
Mine armor for the fray;
And thou shalt wait thy love upon,
With hope and tender orison,
Still thwarting grim Dismay:—
Thy kiss to keep my soul from harm,
Thy truth to brace my fighting arm.

UNWORTHY

SOMETIMES I mark thee in thy gentlest mood,
With pensive air and eyes wherein thy soul
Doth show as in the wave a shining star;
And thy rapt glance bespeaks a farther ken
Than my gross spirit dares, that finds the goal
Set by the passions and the lusts of men;
Nor e'er may hope to clear the mortal bar,
And win, like thee, a heavenly interlude.

Oh, then the blighting fear comes o'er my heart
That thou, too good to share my earthly lot,
And blessing it beyond all meed of praise,
Must in the spirit kingdom sighing see
Him whom thou lovest share thy glory not,
Or but as one far, far removed from thee;
And haunted with the sweet old human days
When love's one strain was that we ne'er should part.

WERE I A BARD WITH ROSES
CROWNED

WERE I a bard with roses crowned
The world mayhap should hear a song
High-raised from the jingling throng
That now the poet name confound.

Unmindful I of other aim
Than but a glad, calm theme to choose
With simplest measures, as became
The reed pipe of the elder muse.

Alas, the poet's world is reft
Of all that made the golden note,
Which coldly falls on ears remote,
With not one nymph or naiad left.

And I who dream of that far day,
And vainly sigh for myrtled ease,
For careless fauns and dryades,
May put the foolish dream away.

So let me sing, if sing I must,
With thornèd wreath of daily care:
'Twere not unmeet a bard to wear,
And rose and thorn alike are dust.

Yet, yet did roses crown my brow,
Might I with Pan contest the prize,
And pipe full clear the strain that now
Within my bosom droops and dies.

A PRAYER

DEAR God! I may not pray to Thee,
As churchmen bid me pray,
From holy book on bended knee,
At mass or vesper say:—
Yet far from me to raise a gibe
At psalm or sacred rite;
Nor am I of the hapless tribe
That will not see Thy light.

Need I to go unto Thy shrine
The pillared aisles among,
When here within this soul of mine
Thy fear or praise hath tongue?
Why should I seek in crowded fane
What still with me abides,
Nor e'er will leave this breast again
Till earth the mansion hides?

Oh, Spirit Dweller of my soul,
Thy altar still is here;
Nor needs a priest, with cross or stole,
My troubled breast to clear.
If I but cast away my sin,
And, seeking, find Thy grace,
Shall not Thy holy peace begin
Ere I may see Thy face?

Thou knowest how dark is my estate,
How weak and prone to ill
This human heart — how strong the fate
Which holds it captive still;
The hands that made me ere my birth,
The hands that after marred,
The wiles that walk my way of earth,
My fortune evil-starred.

To Thee my soul's most secret place
An open page appears;
The sin that I with pain do trace,
Thy judging vision clears.

What need to say to mortal ear
The thing I tell to Thee,—

Nay, wherefore speak, since Thou wilt hear
The soul's mute implory?

Thou, Holy Spirit, Thou shalt shrive
The sinner of his sin,—

Yea, tho' the Sons of Darkness drive
And claim him of their kin:

The light he never quite hath lost
Shall fill the spaces wide,

His soul become the precious cost
For which the Lamb hath died!

MISCELLANY POEMS

A WORSHIPPER

MY love kneels high amid the choir,
I kneeling far below,
Send up my prayer, my warm desire
That cannot higher go;
Ah, this full well I know.

The censer swings, the vested priest
Doth give the peace to all;
But she who hath my care increased,
Forbids my share to fall —
Alas! too soon 'twould pall.

Yet if I raise mine eyes to her,
High in the pillared space,
There seems no calmer worshipper,
Nor such another face,
So dovelike in its grace.

Droop her long lashes on a cheek
That guards its secret well
As her deep heart, that will not speak,
Like any babbling shell,
But throbs unspeakable.

Pale is she, for a ruddy hue
Would ill denote a soul
That knows not pause at let or do,
Since love shall be the goal;
That stakes not part, but whole.

And now they sing: her voice I track
Throughout the choral maze;
Each note my conscious soul gives back,
The while the organ plays,
And saints do stand agaze.

Loud in the Kyrie I hear,
Low in the Miserere,
Her message meant for mine own ear,
Her prayer that meets my prayer
With answering despair.

The mass is done, the priest hath blessed
Each kneeling worshipper;
And all, with holy joy possessed,
The peace of Christ aver —
Save me, with thought of her!

LIFE

A LITTLE space to shut us in:
Four walls to rise and guard
The helpless whom our love doth ward
From outer sorrow, outer sin.

A little grief for the fond dream
That once in sanguine vision led,
And now is of our precious dead,
Tho' none shall see its marble gleam.

A little grace to sweeten strife,
Whate'er the toil, whate'er the lot;
And love and duty unforgot
To those who live but in our life.

A little hope (ah, few have more
Who shall not so themselves deceive)
A little hope — yet let us cleave —
That something better lies before.

A little dust our dust to save,
Till Nature take us back again
With chemic sunshine, kindly rain —
A little dust to make a gravè.

RECOMPENSE

WHEN life is at an end :
Will peace then come
To hearts that throbbed too much,
Or else were dumb
With their great ache and loss?
Shall these the touch
Of death at last befriend,
And lift their cross,
When life is at an end?

When life is at an end :
Shall they who poured
Their meed of love in vain,
Find all restored
By Him, the source of love,
Who gives again
Thrice o'er what they did lend ;
Since still they strove
Till life was at an end?

When life is at an end :
Shall they who sought,
 In humbleness and awe,
The holy thought,—
 Shall they be less than he,
Before the Law,
 Who still to form did bend,
A Pharisee,—
 When life is at an end?

When life is at an end —
Oh, may we leave
 The After then to Him,
Nor idly grieve
 Because we know no more: —
Lo! there lies dim
 The fearsome way — a Friend
To walk before! —
 When life is at an end.

ON A PORTRAIT OF MARY STUART

O H, fair fond face, and eyes that do persuade,
Now thou so long art dust, thy royal cause
Another heart to gain, another blade:—
And whoso in thy sweet defendance draws
The metaphoric sword, shall win the smile
Of women true, of loyal men the praise:—
It is not that I think thee free from guile
(The world's desire is she who still betrays)
Yet, yet, dear Queen,—lo, here upon his knee,
Thy latest slave makes pledge of fealty!

The wild alarms of thy perturbèd day,
The deeds of blood, the foray and the feud,
The 'scapes and perils which thou didst essay,
Less than thy boldest warrior subdued;
The look thou gavest when thou wouldst requite
A chance of death accepted for thy sake,
The sweetness which thou wert to common sight,
The passions that thou couldst not choose but wake,—
All, all leap forth in this rare pictured glance,
And truth is one with thy undreamed romance.

Yet hearts were flint when thy young beauty shone
In that grim land, thine own by hapless fate:

So shall thy sufferings thy fault atone,
Thy courage high the latest ill abate.

Love led thee far and sometimes led thee wrong;
'Tis ever still his wont with such as thou

Who mak'st the world to feel thy spell so strong,
Thine ancient tale appears a thing of now,
And, as thy regal presence lives and charms,
Oh, wondrous tale! — a world is called to arms.

CREDO CHRISTI

LET me not join my voice with those
Who raise the latest cry of doubt,
Who build a system God without,
And rank themselves the changeless foes

Of ancient faith and oracle,
Of Buddha, Vishnu, Moussa, Christ: —
Holding these four as equal priced
With them who have the creeds to sell.

Oh, bitter mock! — that all the years
(So witness, system newly schooled)
Show but an universe befooled
With barren hopes and futile tears: —

That saints all vainly offered up
Their penitential strife and care;
That some did life and love forbear,
And eager drink the martyr's cup: —

That fadeless and undying trust
Should now be held as fitting food
An age barbaric to delude;
And naught essential is but dust.

And He, the fair-faced, the Divine
(For live not they who yet believe?)
Mayhap, He meant not to deceive,
But men have wronged His simple line;

And where a dreamer stood confessed,
Have feigned or madly felt a god —
That in Judea's mirings trod,
And died with wretches, breast to breast!



What do they give (these gods destroyed)
To wake the saving fear and hope?
How draw another horoscope,
And recreate the Heavens void?

A germic theory to prove
How Man, descended of the Ape,
Thinks his earth-centred lot to 'scape,
And rise into a higher groove;

And share the secret of the stars,
Their source dim-sought, their changing plan —
For Faith that likens God to man
With ease the Infinite unbars!



There is no good, the scoffers say,
Save that which springeth from the sense
Of human right — nor appetite
For evil, but the self-same way.

Wipe clean the myth-enpeopled sky,
So Reason may discern her track:
Write in the truer zodiac,
And let the old confusions die!

Must this suffice, and naught to boot,
For Love's immortal heritage? —
An empty Heaven the Christless wage,
A Faith disrupted, branch and root.



'Tis sometimes hard to choose between
The Faith entrenched in formula,
Compelling vulgar fear and awe,
As from the first its due hath been;

And that free thought which will not see
How God in forms, as works, may live;
Which puts a barren negative
As answer to the mystery.

For hands of men will ever mar
The structure by the Godhead laid;
And priestship aye become a trade
To drive the questing spirit far.

Yet must we take with such alloy
The Truth that shall this lot redeem;
Submitting to the things which seem
Designed to work our souls annoy.

For this was part of that same cross
Which He of Calvary upbore;
Nor shall we miss the trial sore,
If all our hope come not to loss.



The Christ that saved my soul for me —
(If I do not His truth betray)
'Tis not His Godship to gainsay
That I a hollow worship flee.

Nay, rather do I make retreat
That His fair image bear no flaw,
And I may better see the law
Which leads unto the higher seat.

Deep in my soul He hath abode,
Since, as a child, the wondrous tale,
The Love that shall o'er Death prevail,
The blood redeeming God-bestowed,—

Did by degrees my sense possess;
Till, crescive with the forming mind,
The marvel grew, tho' undefined,
And growing in its power to bless:—

Aye, and to curse—should reasoned pride
Beguile me from the path afar,
The mystic promise of the Star
Which rose the seekers' steps to guide.

Dark is my soul and error-tossed,
An easy conquest to the foe:
Yet there is One, full well I know,
Without whose will I am not lost.



To all men shall a doubt arise
When seeking, with a finite grasp,
The Three-Fold Mystery to clasp,
The Lamb's supernal sacrifice;

The plot that seemeth to embrace,
With its divinely planted hope,
A straitened sum, a narrow scope,
A fraction of the darkling race:—

As He who His Begotten gave
The deathful trespass to atone,
Should call but part of these His own,
Nor hold an equal scheme to save.

But this is idle — worse than vain,
So to accuse His aim benign:
So doth a vexing child repine
That wisheth things forbid to gain.

Mark how the father, loving much,
Would keep the harmful guerdon back;
Albeit his wisdom seem to lack
The warm response of Nature's touch.

E'en so with Him, the primal cause
Of all obedience, all pursuit
Of knowledge, whatsoe'er the fruit —
 'Tis He, too, that ordaineth pause;

And still withholdeth from our ken
The story of yon speechless vault;
Else might the daring quest cry halt
 Unto each shining citizen!



Enough that He who rules is good,
And earnest giveth of His will
To ransom every soul from ill,
 With grace of the Atoning Rood:—

And so hath spread His promise wide,
That all may read the gracious sign;
Or, failing some, His love divine
 Shall for the sightless, too, provide.

Enough that shines the light for me,
Tho' myriads languish in the dark:—
Sing high, my soul, and like the lark,
 Above the mists of doubting flee!

THE BISHOP

THE Bishop is dead — I passed his door,
And a fluttering crape could tell no more:
Sombre the mansion whence life is fled,
And the idle walk near with a careless tread;
But some do pause as the deep bells toll,
To cross themselves, with a "Rest his soul!"

A pious care — yet what needs the thought,
When the Lord's anointed to dust is brought;
When the shepherd who guided the fearsome sheep
No longer his vigil of love doth keep;
When the hands and the lips are cold and dumb
That ministered oft the viaticum?

'Tis so ordained that the just shall pray
For the saint who hath been taken away;
E'en tho' his estate be past all doubt,
Yet few have the soul herself found out,
And a saving thought (that admits no sin)
May help him his higher crown to win.

The house is dark, but, across the street,
The quiring singers in sadness meet;
And the mourning many do throng the nave
Where anew the text of the worm and grave
Is preached with a feeling that might not be
Ere the Bishop himself saw the mystery!

For a solemn something is resting there,
And the swelling sob of the Miserere
Hath a meaning that ne'er before it had,
When the mitred man on his throne was glad:
And the people are bowed with a stricken sense
Of the equal hand of Omnipotence.

Lo! where he lies in the awful state
Of a glory that Death may not abate:—
His vestments rich, with embroidered cross—
Mayhap, it was heavy, despite the gloss
And pomp sufficient which here are seen
In the splendid house of the Nazarene.

Ah, well!—the moral, the type ne'er mix—
Let us rather look at the crucifix
That he holds e'en now to his silent breast,
As the sign of his hope and the seal of his rest.
'Twas pressed to his lips when his soul took flight,
And sainted it seems in the people's sight.

Is it vain indeed to seek for a trace
Of that first rapture on his calm face,
When the spirit, escaping its mortal thrall,
Did its merited joy and peace forestall;
And the dying sense for a space might seize
The hymning of Heavenly harmonies?

Alas!—to a credulous faith may be
That which its hope o'erleaps to see;
But for me there is naught but a mask of clay,
Which, were 't to endure to the judgment day,
Should never a hint of the truth betray:
For Death wipes out with his equal dust
The fear of the sinner, the saint's high trust!

Yet bravely he lies, tho' he speaketh naught;
His crozier beside him,—his vestments wrought
With a lavish richness which is not sin,
Since thrift in the temple may not begin:
And the people view him with self-same awe
As when living he witnessed the Master's law.

Oh, a burthen grievous it must have been,
Tho' the sightless face seem now serene;
And if there were failings—but stop!—not so:

For the Lord He judgeth all men below;
And the Bishop anointed shall equal stand
With the sinner who scarce might a hope command.



Let us leave him there in his cope of gold,
Ere they fit his frame for the final mould.
Some grace, mayhap, shall our portion be
If we ponder with due solemnity,
How the worm and the dust aye work their will,
And the highest of earth fall the lowest still!

For the Bishop is dead — I passed his door,
And a fluttering crape could tell no more.
Dark is the mansion whence life is fled,
And the idle walk by with a heedless tread:
But some there be (and we of the roll)
Who pause as the mourning bells do toll,
To cross themselves, with a "Rest his soul!"

MY DEBT TO THEE, THOU
PLEASANT WEED

MY debt to thee, thou pleasant weed,
No poet's tribute might exceed.
The genii of thy curling rope
Have given me a larger hope,
And spread the scene where I am pent,
To Fancy's farthest continent.

Thine is the spell that equals me
With bards of widest empery:—
What tho' a leisure scant is mine,
A niggard muse, a halting line,—
Thou hintest at a golden fame
That yet shall deck a humble name.

From Care that sits my shoulder near
(No household god than he more dear)
Thou givest me respite—or, at least,
Soothest as doth the bidden priest,
With thine own mild philosophy,
Against the things which aye must be.

When chafing in the cramped lot
That here is mine (tho' why, God wot)
And vainly dreaming of a chance,
Yet all unhopèd, deliverance,—
Thou helpst me to think it true,—
And eke to deem the fools are two.

'Tis thus for every passing ill
Thou hast a balm efficient still;
The kindest friend man ever had,
Thou changest life's jeremiad
Unto a pleasant song and glad;
And smoothest o'er the rugged ways
With thy true note of honest praise.

Nor shall I pause (tho' near the strife
To much prefer thee to a wife;
For tho' her sweetness hath no end,
And all the virtues in her blend,
Yet some day will she find a tongue
As keen as ever barbed or stung.

Therefore it is, oh, kindly weed,
No rhymèd glozing can exceed
The debt thou hast imposed on me
With thine own sweet philosophy;
Making the best (in homely phrase)
Of the long count of common days.

Believe me, while a care's to gain,
No cross shall come betwixt us twain;
And when the final hour is near,
Thou shalt not then be held less dear;
But I may give my latest breath
In grateful love to thee — and Death.

A FRAGMENT

S HALL I confess?—In my short span of life,
Much have I missed that Wisdom aye would
teach:

Truant I proved, as to a scolding wife,
And sought the shrine where Folly still doth preach
Her homilies beguiling:—so, of saws
And proverbs ripe, wherewith to meet the brunt
Of fortune's hap, gleaned I but scanty store;
While, bent to pluck the ribbon in the front
Of my gay mistress, laughed I at all laws
That might have stayed my wildly careless score.

A loser?—Yes, but haply not beyond
The saving grace that sad fruition brings:
My faith doth hold, th' Chastener still is fond,
Soothing away, as 'twere, the penal stings
Of his untoward children—as a sire,
Grieving and tender, yet with rigor just,
Spares not the rod, e'en while his looks inspire
A hope that plucks the sinner from the dust.

No plot so old as this in all the scheme
Of our strange world: methinks the fashion came
Coeval with the figleaf and the theme
Of Adam's love and sorrow, sin and shame.
And we of his sad portion still must take—
Eating the fruit that drew the primal curse,
Drinking vain draughts a quenchless thirst to
slake—
And ever the trite tragedy rehearse.

* * *

But, tho' our Edens vanish and the doom
Press hard on us, the latest of the seed,
Till, in our puny daring, we assume
To break the bond and other signals read
Save those set in the charter of our fate—
(All-impotent to change our fixed estate)
Still, still the gods grind out their stated store,
And aye the tale is neither less nor more.

To sin and sorrow, to give scope to joy
O'erleaping license in the heady rush
Of early spirits, and the fevered flush
Of hope untried, seeking a fond employ:—
To play with passion in our lavish prime,
And, moth-like, burning in the grosser flame

Of earthly love or lust — as men may name
 The madness of the moment — 'tis the same,
 And still hath been, from all undated time:—

This makes the sum for many — nay, for most,
 Tho' Virtue still will have her specious boast;
 For men will swear they love her overmuch,
 When, at the spell of Time's ungentle touch,
 They bid the rosy follies all adieu,
 And smugly their old innocence renew; —
 At least, cast off the lure which still hath held
 The strongest that the race have ever quelled:
 Aye, and the wisest — Paphos draws no line
 'Twixt Antony and David the divine,
 Or e'en his wiser son, who preaches still
 'Gainst avid senses and a lawless will;
 Yet could not his own royal calm preserve
 When Sheba tickled his erotic nerve.

* * *

Let kindness reign: sure He that came to save
 Taught naught so much as this, and shall not we
 A little hearken to the words He gave,
 Like some that heard and blessed in Galilee?

Something we pardon still to that fond clay
 Which overseeks the mandate to obey;
 Adding to the divine a human touch

That all too grossly mingles with love's own :
Yet he whose trespass lies in loving much,
Stands not in Love's first, darling world alone.

Did not Love bring to us the master-key
Of what were else but deathful mystery?
Was He not before Chaos and Old Night,
A demiurge ere Eden's new delight,
When the young stars first raised their choral shout
Of praise unto the Planner of the spheres? —
And down the many cycles—thro' all tears
And bitterness—till faith be one with doubt,
The promise of his rainbow smile appears.

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THE BIRTHDAY

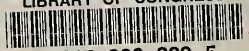
I WAS born upon a day
That I keep with grief alway.
Of these days a barren score,
Three, besides a lustrum more,
Have I counted, while the span,
Like a spendthrift, hath outrun
Every grace that falls to man —
And I wish the tale were done!

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